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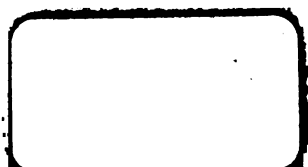
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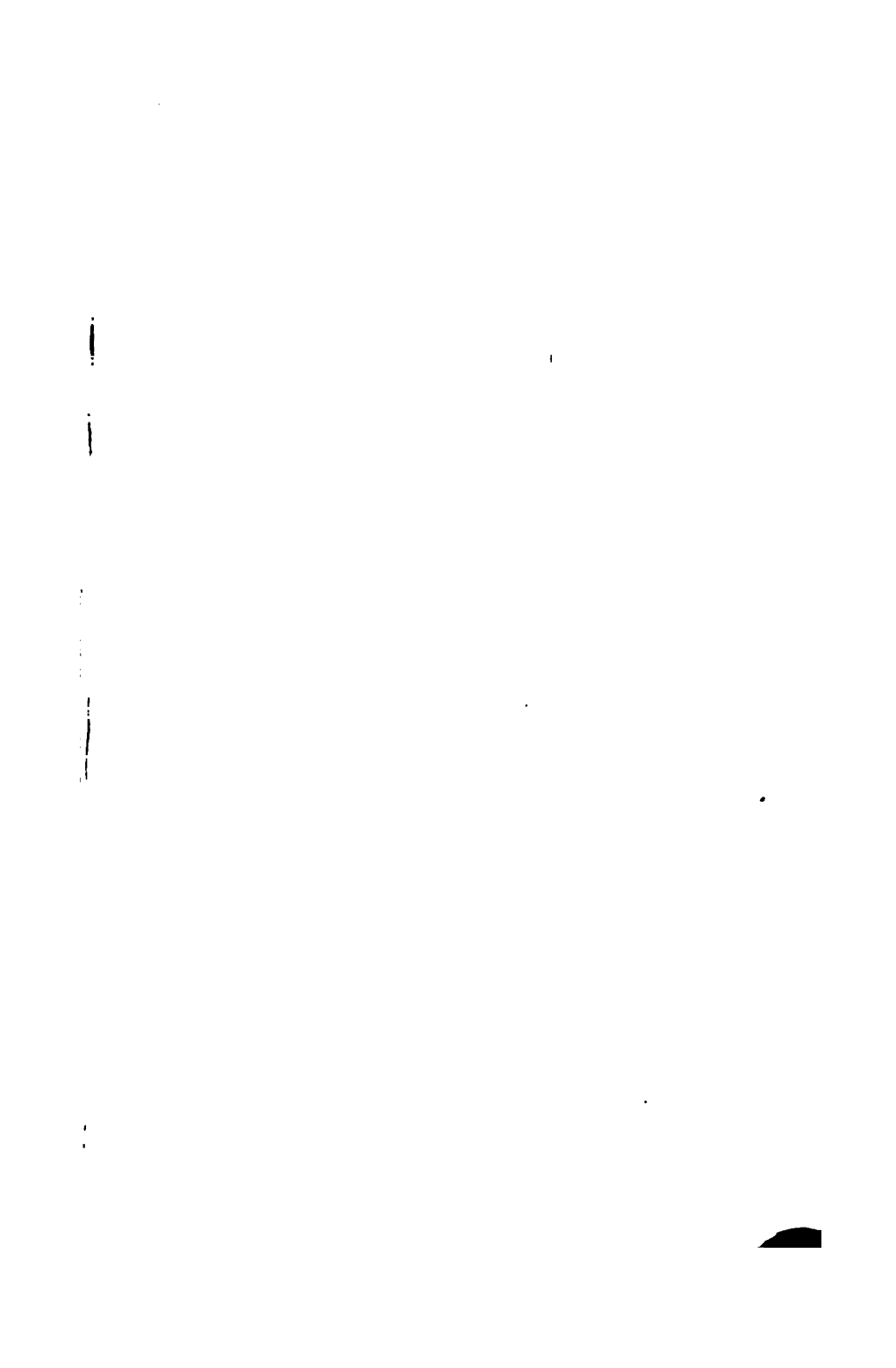


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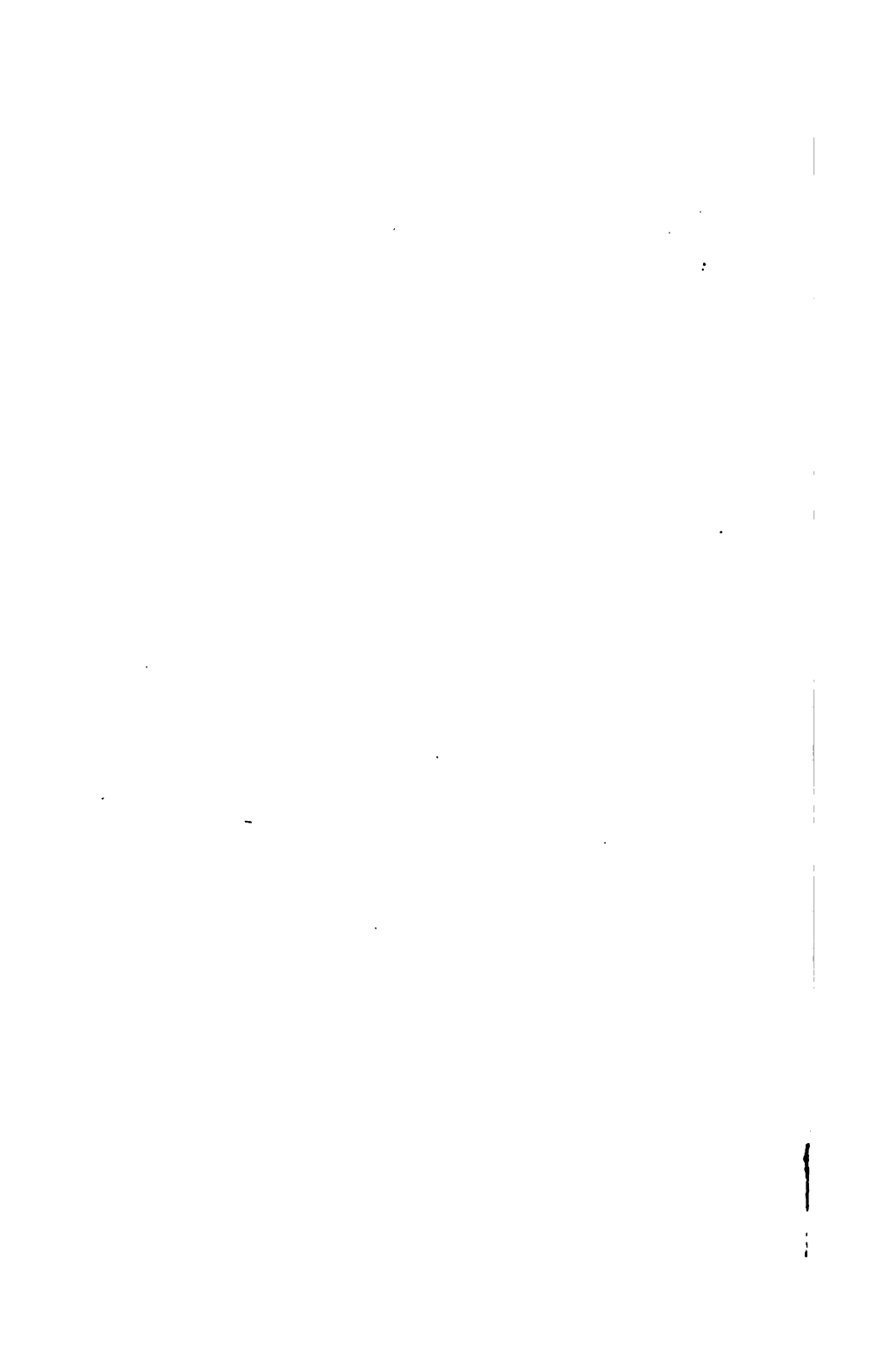
To the State.

The Author,

has been agreed - In
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"THAT'S WHAT I'VE PAID TO SAVE MY LITTLE SISTER FROM YOU—YOU BEAST!"

Frontispiece. Page 271.



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THE CHORUS LADY

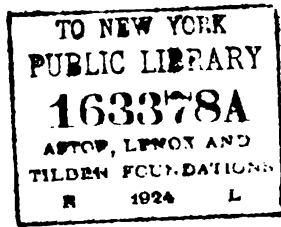
BY
JAMES FORBES

NOVELIZED FROM THE PLAY BY
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Illustrations from Scenes of the Play

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The Chorus Lady

Issued March, 1908



TO
Rose Stahl

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THE CHORUS LADY.

CHAPTER I.

MORNING was breaking under a cheerless November sky athwart which a wind blowing strongly from the west sent the low-hanging clouds scurrying as though it sought to block the gates of dawn and retard the coming of day. A cold rain slanted on to the sodden ground and dripped monotonously from the eaves of a lone wooden shed which, dignified with the title of station—or, rather, in the vernacular of the natives, dee-po—marked the stopping-off place for Maple Grove.

As even the biggest dunce in the smallest public school knows full well Maple Grove is in Virginia on the line of the Richmond, Potomac and Fredericksburg Railroad, not a hundred miles from Richmond; and should any one be so ill informed as not to know that Maple Grove's title to fame lies in the fact that Dan Mallory's training stable has been established

for two years in its vicinity, it is safe to say that he, or she, would be the object of surprised commiseration on the part of each and all of the village's three hundred inhabitants. For did not that famous mare Lady Belle, the pride of the stable and of Maple Grove, win the Washington Cup at Bennings last season—win in a canter? And did not Maple Grove back her to a man, aye, to a woman? Of course she did, and of course it did. And that is why Maple Grove, flushed with pride and with its sudden accession of unearned increment, took its place at once, and, be it said, with all due dignity, as one of the important communities of the United States.

At the station, where the solitary oil lamp blinked lividly in the growing daylight, the rain beat in fierce squalls upon the hood of a buggy and upon a horse which was seeking consolation in his nose-bag. In the shelter of the shed, his hands thrust deeply into the pockets of his overcoat, leaned Daniel Mallory himself. The first express from Washington—which stopped at Maple Grove only by request of passengers—was not due for a quarter of an hour, and the minutes were lagging tiresomely, as they have an exas-

perating trick of doing when one is waiting for a train. But the thoughts of the man in the shed were soon far away from Maple Grove. The blinking lamp and misty pall of rain were blotted out by a vision of a pair of big blue eyes smiling at him now roguishly, now with tender wistfulness, from a girl's pretty face about which a wealth of blond tresses rioted rebelliously. And the vision brought a responsive, though unconscious, smile to his own physiognomy.

Daniel Mallory was a good-looking, strongly built man of thirty. His eyes, like those of the face of his vision, were blue, and usually they gazed upon the world in kindness, quick to note the good and the humorous in it. The square, clean-shaved jaw, however, indicated that if his disposition was genial he was not lacking in determination and energy. And this his career had demonstrated.

Born in Richmond, of very poor parents, immigrants from Ireland, who had died when he was young, he had been compelled to shift for himself at an age when most boys are just getting used to school. His very first job was in a livery-stable, and there his interest in horses began. So great did this interest be-

come that he made his way to Kentucky to procure employment at a racing-stable, and what he learned in the Blue Grass State about "man's second best friend," coupled with innate and early developed shrewdness and business acumen, went far to make up for the deficiency of his knowledge of the three R's. With these natural qualities he possessed much independence of spirit and that aspiration to be his own master which characterizes the Irish race and brings it to the fore the world over.

His ambition was to be a race-horse owner and trainer himself, and he set about his preparations to become one by saving his money. Early in the game he learned by hard but salutary experience that the acquisition of the needed capital was not to be had by the get-rich-quick allurements of the betting-ring. This conviction, acquired at his own expense, was confirmed by his observation of the ups and downs of his associates, and he resolutely eliminated the element of hazard from his plan of campaign. With equal resolution and cold deliberation he decided to steer clear of all possibility of matrimonial entanglement, on the time-worn principle that he who takes unto himself a

wife thereby pays heavy hostage to fortune, and often handicaps himself in the race for that goal of success which is interpreted in dollars and cents by the great majority of mortals.

But chance, luck—or fate, as some will have it—is a factor that enters inevitably into the accomplishment of the life cycle of man, and, quite independently of his desires in the matter, disposes where he proposes. Thus one fine day there came as helper at the training-stable Patrick O'Brien, with his wife and a ten-year-old daughter, Nora. Another daughter, Patricia, six years older, was in New York, apprenticed to Madame Elise, a fashionable modiste in Fifth Avenue. Madame Elise in reality was plain Lizzie Casey, and Mrs. O'Brien had known her years before in Brooklyn when Lizzie was learning the business with no thought of giving a French twist to her Christian name. Patricia was the owner of the face that was now appearing to Mallory. O'Brien had seen better days. He had been a trainer, but had failed in business. Like most trainers he had been opposed to betting, yet in his misfortune he resorted to it in an effort to retrieve his losses and had only sunk the deeper

into the mire of poverty until his wife, a strong-minded daughter of the Emerald Isle, whom—having little will of his own left, or, at any rate, little disposition to exercise it—he obeyed as meekly as his children did, had called a halt and threatened him with the direst consequences if he ever put another cent on a horse. Partly from fear of his wife, partly because he realized the futility of his efforts to win his money back, and partly because he did not wish to set a bad example to his daughters, whom he loved devotedly, he had, like Mallory, definitely set his face against betting.

The men took a liking to each other, and Mallory went to lodge with the family. At that time he was twenty-six years old, and nothing had occurred to incline him to modify in the slightest degree his views as to the effect of marriage on a poor man's prospects. He was rather fond of airing them at the evening reunions of the family and of expatiating upon the advantages of bachelordom and his imperviousness to feminine wiles. Which notions, after a few sharp passages of arms when the subject was first broached, were invariably treated with silent scorn by Mrs.

O'Brien, but never failed to call forth from O'Brien (under the eye of his spouse) a perfervid panegyric of the home and family.

"Phwat," he would demand triumphantly, holding himself up as an example in support of his own arguments and a crushing refutation of those of his lodger, "phwat would Oi be without me woife?"

And Mallory would acquiesce readily in the old fellow's answer to his own query:

"Oi'd be a lost pup!"

Gallantly, also, being of too kindly a nature to desire to give real cause for offense, he would win a mollified reproof from Mrs. O'Brien by volunteering the avowal that if it were ever his good fortune to meet with a woman who he could be sure possessed the unsurpassable domestic virtues and qualifications of his hostess, he would almost certainly change his mind and ideas.

"Ain't he the bhoy for the blarney!" she would say, with an indulgent smile. "G'wan wid ye! 'Tis tin to wan ye'll make a fule av yirsilf an' lose yir hid to a gal wid a puerty face that doan't know how to peel a pertaty."

It was nearly two years after his installation as a member of the family—for the O'Briens treated him as a son, and he who never had known the comfort of having some one to look after him returned their interest in him with a regard that was little less than affectionate—when Patricia came into his life. She arrived at the Christmas holiday time. Her parents had never wearied of extolling their Patsy, as they called her, but she proved to be entirely different from what he had pictured her. A pretty, slender girl, piquante, wide-awake, full of fun, and with an extraordinary vocabulary of New York slang, she transformed the whole household with the joy she diffused from the minute of her arrival. Mallory soon found that back of her liveliness and fun-loving disposition she possessed a large capacity for discernment and common sense which had been quickened by the sophistication furnished by her experience in the metropolis. Moreover, she possessed a will of her own inherited from her mother and strengthened by her early liberty from parental restraint. He had never seen or imagined any girl like her. As to Patsy, she had taken to him from the moment their hands had

met, and she had looked into his honest, laughing eyes, and, what was essentially characteristic of her, she had been at no pains whatever to disguise the fact. It was not long before she inspired her parents' lodger with a sentiment under the influence of which his prejudices in respect of women and matrimony underwent a rapid and decisive revision, to the huge delight of Mrs. O'Brien.

Patsy made up her mind that Mallory was the one man in the world for her, and that she would marry him; but the meal-table conversation had enlightened her as to the views he had entertained, and she sympathized, to a large extent, with his logic, for she was every bit as ambitious for him as he was for himself. Therefore, when at last the telling of the oldest and sweetest story ever uttered by human lips had made her his and the happiest girl in all the world, and he urged her to name the day, and make it soon—finding in his joyful eagerness as many cogent reasons in favor of this course as formerly he had adduced against it—she placed her hand in his, and, gazing at him with the glory of her happiness shining in her eyes and with an intonation of love-tenderness

that would have divested her speech of any incongruity even to an unemotional listener, said:

"No, Dan. There ain't no spavin' on my interlleck, and I ain't the girl to put kinks in your ambition. I'll name the day, all right, all right, when you have a stable of your own—not before."

"But," pleaded Mallory ruefully, "there ain't no prospect of me getting a stable of me own, as I can see."

"You'll get it one of these days, unless I've sized you up wrong," she assured him.

A few months after her return to New York the family were startled by a bombshell in the shape of a letter from Patsy announcing that she had left Madame Elise's, owing to a quarrel with the book-keeper, and gone on the stage. To say that her parents were horrified is to put it mildly. As it appeared to them then, the stage was a toboggan-slide to ruin and perdition, and the fact that her first letter contained the first of a series of weekly remittances three times as large as the wages she had been receiving as errand-girl under the guise of apprentice, only confirmed them in this view. Mallory was not less startled. It

brought to him the realization of the fact that he loved her so that the thought of losing her, the very idea that she might belong to another, was unendurable.

Her parents summoned her home peremptorily, and she came and had it out with them. She explained her departure from the milliner's and her entrance into the theatrical profession in this wise:

"I couldn't stand for the book-keep, but seein' he was head handholder for Madame it made it kinder embarrassin', an' I took the exit without bluefoots or tremolo music. Me carryin' home hats to the girls at the Casino got me real intimate with 'em, an' when I was down an' out they sez 'What's the matter with breakin' into the show business?' An' the next week I was there with a smile an' a shape—if I do say it as shouldn't—that got me third from the end in short order. Of course, now the book-keep's married Madame an' is makin' a book at the track, things 'u'd be different, but I'm in the show business for keeps."

Mrs. O'Brien did not see it that way. For the first and only time there was a fight to a finish for supremacy between mother and daughter. It lasted

about a week, and although Mrs. O'Brien brought into action her formidable reinforcements and reserves in the persons of O'Brien and Mallory, Patsy "stood pat."

"I'm not a baa-lamb. I'm eighteen, and I know what I'm doin'," she declared.

Mallory, driven to desperation, went so far as to cast the first shadow on the sun-bathed horizon of their bliss by intimating that he feared it would be all over between them if she insisted on going on the stage.

"What are you afraid of?" she demanded quietly.

"Well," he replied, with some hesitation and embarrassment, "I've heered tell that the stage ain't no place for no good girl."

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"Daniel Mallory," she said, "cut that out, and forget it. Remember, we're goin' to spiel through life together. You've got to trust me for good an' all—trust me without a string to it—in all places an' all things. You've got to believe in me as I believe in you. You can't put no blinders on me, and you can't put no hobbles."

He returned her gaze steadily.

"You're all right, little one," he answered at length, very gently and very slowly. "I will never raise that question again. I will trust you at all times, in all things."

"It's a deal," she said. "Cinch it. Give me your mitt on it."

He held out his hand and she grasped it. Then, with a sudden impulse, she raised it, pressed it against her cheek, and covered it with kisses.

"Oh, Dan, my Dan, you're a *man*!" she cried, and as he clasped her to him in a passionate embrace he saw that her eyes were wet.

Mallory's opposition having been overcome, the capitulation of her parents followed. It was the same with the stage as with every other line of work, she said, it depended on the girl herself whether or not she remained good and virtuous. She knew many chorus-girls who were both, and she wanted to know why they should doubt her ability to take care of herself. Besides, she pointed out that the salary she was receiving—\$15 a week—was something to which she could not aspire for some years in the millinery busi-

ness. And so she had her way; and her frequent visits home, which showed that she was the same Patsy, and the great help to them of the larger share of her salary which they received with unfailing regularity when she had any to send, and on which they came to rely, brought them around to the view that the theatrical profession was not by any means so black as it was painted, and finally that it was as good as most others and a great deal better than some.

Mallory, spurred by the grit of his sweetheart and the prize held out to him, to even greater efforts than he had previously put forth, procured a lucrative position as manager of a racing-stable, and in course of time amassed enough to establish a stable of his own. He selected Maple Grove as the site for it, and, of course, he took with him the O'Brien family, which he long since had come to consider as his own. At first things had gone well, and the day for the wedding at last had been fixed. But it was not yet to be. A series of misfortunes crippled Mallory's resources so seriously that Patsy insisted on a postponement. A number of horses fell sick and died, and fire, against which there was no insurance, wiped out most of his

buildings. Mallory found himself facing probable ruin with the foundering of all his hopes unless help arrived from some quarter. In this extremity one of the patrons of the stable found a likely partner for him in Richard Crawford, a wealthy young New Yorker, well known as a clubman and man about town who was much interested in horses and horse-racing. It had been arranged that Mr. Crawford, whom Mallory had never seen, should run down to look over the quarters and the animals, and he had wired the trainer that he would arrive on the train for which Mallory was then waiting.

Dan was roused from his reverie by the distant, hoarse whistle of the locomotive, and in another minute the express came thundering and groaning into the station. As it slowed up, the only passenger for Maple Grove swung lightly off and found himself face to face with the waiting man.

"Mr. Crawford?" questioned Mallory.

"Yes. Mr. Mallory?" came an answering query.

"That's me," said the trainer, and as they exchanged a cordial handshake they took stock of each other in a rapid glance.

Mallory was very favorably impressed. His prospective partner was a clean-cut, well-set-up man of about his own age, and in dress and bearing carried the stamp of good breeding. While he would not have been adjudged handsome by most women, he was certainly not bad looking, especially when he smiled, and there was an ease and cordiality about him that to Mallory were most attractive. The visitor made light of the inclement weather, which as they approached the trainer's domain showed signs of clearing up, and they were on the best of terms long before the three-mile journey from the station had been covered.

CHAPTER II.

"S'elp me bob! D'yer mean that, Shrimp?"

The Duke—recorded in the register of births of the Parish of Marylebone, London, as plain William Perkins, but favored with his exalted title by the other stable-boys of the Mallory quarters—dropped the sponge with which he had been performing the morning toilet of one of his thoroughbred charges, and drew himself up to the full height of his five feet nothing, as he gazed at his fellow helper with incredulous indignation.

"I mean jest what I said," responded the Shrimp, otherwise James Mitchell, who claimed Newark, N. J., as his natal city. "If she don't pay me them five bones by Saturday I'll ask the old 'ooman for 'em."

"I s'y," remonstrated the Duke, aghast, "yer wouldn't split on the gal!"

"Sure's yer born," declared the Shrimp complacently.

"But——"

"There ain't no buts about it. Didn't she bet me yer mount'd win in de trial spin, and didn't she lose? An' if I'd 'a' lost wouldn't she have wanted her five plunks? Of course. An' I want mine, an', what's more, I'm goin' to have de money. She might 'a' knowed yer couldn't ride a horse an' that she'd lose, anyhow."

"Me not ride an 'orse!"

"That's what I said. Take my tip, Dook, de next time we has a race don't get on its back, get inside."

The Duke, at this deadly insult, reddened to the tip of his little, turned-up nose, and his fists closed convulsively, but he restrained himself.

"*H'll* be winnin' the Futurity or the Derby when you're scrapin' a canal moke," he said.

Then reverting to the subject of their conversation, he continued insinuatingly:

"That 'ere bet weren't serious, it wus on'y a lark, yer now, Shrimp."

"Lark nothin'! It was a bet, fair an' square, and I wants me money."

"But Miss Nora's daown the pan. She ain't got it; she told yer so."

"She ain't, ain't she! D'yer believe that dope, yer bughouse? Besides, if she ain't, it's up to her to get it p. d. q. That's all."

"Well," commented the Duke disgustedly, "I allus knowed you wus several kinds o' things, but I never thought you wus a bloomin' sneak."

"I don't see what youse want ter butt in fer, anyway," declared the Shrimp, waxing angry in turn. "It ain't none o' your funeral. Why don't yer pay it yerself, if you're so blamed anxious about it? I wouldn't believe dat girl under oath. She can't have me fer no sucker."

"When you speaks of a lydy before me—henny lydy, d'y' 'ear?—you speak respeckful," commanded the Duke, with dangerous dignity and quietness.

"Nora a lady! Aw, come off! Yer gives me de willies wid yer airs," retorted the Shrimp. "I have a hunch you're stuck on her, yer chump."

The idea seemed to tickle him.

"Stuck on Nora! Oh, lor! Look who's stuck on her," he chuckled. "The Dook in love an' stuck on Nora!"

And he burst into a roar of uncontrollable laughter.

"Strike me dead! You s'y thet ag'in an' I'll pull yer boko," said the Duke, going over to him menacingly.

The Shrimp's hilarity ceased abruptly.

"*You'll* pull me boko! I guess *nit*. See me lick de stuffin' out'n yer."

In the fierce set-to that ensued without further waste of breath and with lightning rapidity there were no calls for "time," nor was there any thought of conforming to the rules which are supposed to govern fistic encounters—save and except that one prohibitory of hitting below the belt, the observance of which is instinctive among boys, as among men, in whom the Anglo-Saxon spirit of fair play is implanted.

The Duke was getting decidedly the worst of the impromptu duel. The Shrimp, in the parlance of the fancy, had got his weaker opponent's head "in chancery," and was utilizing his advantage vigorously, to the visible detriment of the former's nose and left eye, when the sound of approaching footsteps caused him to release his hold in haste.

"Cheese it! De boss!" he cried.

Both boys dashed to their pails and resumed their grooming operations with great industry.

The next moment a young girl entered the stable. It was plain from her demeanor that she was not pleased.

"You boys are a perfect nuisance," she complained. "I've been calling you the last ten minutes. Breakfast's been ready for an hour."

The Shrimp turned his head and scowled at her.

"Oh, all right!" he growled.

Her quest and mission ended, she was about to go, when she caught sight of the Duke's face and noted its flushed and swollen appearance.

"You've been fighting again," she commented suspiciously.

"Ow, now; not what you'd cawl fightin', Miss Nora," the Duke assured her, with a cheerful grin. "It wus just a little scrap, friendly like, for exercise, donchernow."

"Yes, we wus fightin', fightin' for fair, an' if you hadn't butted in I'd 'a' knocked his block off," contradicted the Shrimp surlily. "You're always pokin' your nose where you're not wanted."

"Well, I like—your—cheek!" said the girl, looking him up and down with haughty indignation. "Pop said if he caught you fighting again he'd fire both of you, and I'm going to tell him, so there!"

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" he retorted, in a tone of defiant menace. "Maybe *I* won't have sump'n' to tell him about *you*. I'm goin' to put him wise to yer carryin's on this very minute, unless yer coughs up dat dough yer owes me."

"Tell tyle tit,
Yer tongue shall be split,
An' all the little puppy dawgs
Shall 'ave a little bit,"

recited the Duke, in a sing-song voice, imitating a child.

"You shut up, or I'll wipe you over the kisser," warned the Shrimp.

"G'arn," retorted the Duke, with a mocking grimace, "if I wusn't a lydy I'd push yer fyce in."

Further argument was prevented by the advent of Mallory, accompanied by Mr. Crawford and O'Brien.

"Fur hiv'n's sake, but I thought you bhoys was at brikfast long ago," said O'Brien. "Ye'd bitter git over to the house at wanst or it's precious little ye'll be gittin', I'm afther thinking."

The boys slipped out, and Nora would gladly have followed them, but her father stopped her.

"Me daughter, Mr. Crawford, sor; me daughter Nora," he explained, his honest, ruddy face beaming with pride.

Nora blushed, and, with downcast gaze, stood before the stranger.

Crawford, with easy politeness, doffed his hat.

"I am awfully pleased to meet you, Miss Nora," he said, in a soft, low voice, adding: "You are very fortunate to have such a charming daughter, Mr. O'Brien."

The old man regarded the visitor with a dubiousness which was quickly succeeded by positive disapproval. He did not like this sudden change from the brisk business manner with which Crawford had previously comported himself, and somehow the man's intonation and attitude jarred upon him, struck a discordant note in his heart. Up to that moment, in his eagerness to further Dan's interests by representing everything in a light as favorable as possible, he had not paused to analyze impressions; but now that the personal factor intervened he decided that he did not

like the prospective partner of his son-in-law-to-be. He could not have said just why. It was purely instinctive.

As to Nora, encouraged by the unaccustomed gentleness and courtliness of his speech, the girl ventured to look at him, and as timidly she held out her hand, and he clasped it with a warm pressure, she encountered his gaze of mingled amusement and admiration.

Nora's eyes were large and dark and expressive. Crawford thought he had never seen any more beautiful. But they were not by any means the girl's only charm. She was distinctly pretty, with small, regular features, and a blush-rose complexion which her dark hair, worn in a braid down her back, set off to the best possible advantage. Although barely seventeen, she was well developed, and her plain cotton dress, white, with thin red stripes, was becoming in its very simplicity. In a word, she looked just what she was—a sweet, naïve, country lassie.

"I'm sure we shall be good friends," he said encouragingly.

"Y-yes, sir," she stammered, reddening still deeper, and hastily withdrawing her hand, she made her escape.

"A veritable wild rose," commented Crawford mentally. Then he gave no further thought to her.

While he continued his inspection Nora hurried back to the house, her heart beating violently with the excitement of the unexpected *rencontre*. Never before had she been spoken to by a real gentleman, or treated otherwise than as a child. This stranger from the great metropolis, the wonder city of her day-dreaming, this Prince Charming of the dulcet voice, had recognized her as a grown-up person, as a *young lady*, and actually had taken off his hat to her! And amid the tumultuous thoughts and reflections that surged incontinently into her flattered little head there was a vague mortification that he had not beheld her in her Sunday frock at least; and, born of a recrudescence of envy, a feeling of resentment that she could not, like her actress sister, adorn herself in garments of the style worn in that hub of fashion. New York.

CHAPTER III.

In the spacious living-room of the trainer's house, which served the purpose of kitchen and dining-room, the Duke and his enemy, the Shrimp, sat at the table disposing, with ravenous appetite, of the good things provided for the first repast of the day by Mrs. O'Brien. Nora, still excited and jubilant, was serving them, and as she flitted lightly about from dresser to stove and from stove to table she cast complacent glances at herself whenever she passed a small mirror that hung on the wall. The Duke followed her movements with sheepish, adoring eyes. The Shrimp bent sullenly over his plate, intent only on what was upon it.

"Might I trouble you for a little more of that 'ash, Miss Nora?" asked her admirer, with about the deference with which he would have addressed the Queen of England.

"No, you might not," snapped Nora. "And you needn't make googoo eyes at me, either. I have no use for you any more."

"I ain't to blyme; I couldn't 'elp it," pleaded the boy, who cared nothing about a further helping of hash, but did care a very great deal to retain Nora's good graces.

"I'm sure it was your fault, and I'll never speak to you again for getting me into this trouble," the girl insisted.

"Hindeed it wusn't," he assured her humbly. "As I've already explyned, Shrimp, 'ere, on Ginger crowded me into the deep-goin' on the ry'ls, an' Lydy Belle didn't like it."

"It's a lie!" shouted the Shrimp fiercely. "It was a fair race, an' I wants me money."

"Then you'll have to wait for it," said Nora decisively.

"I needs the coin," an' I won't stand for no welchin'."

"Haven't I always paid you?"

"Yer kep' me waitin' t'ree months de last time, and it was like drawin' a tooth to get it out'n yer, and that was on'y a dollar."

"But I tell you I haven't got it. Besides, you know very well I never really meant to bet so much. I never had such a sum in my life."

"Rats! Don't give me no such song an' dance as that, 'cause I won't stand for it. I'm no jay, see?"

Nora began to cry, and the Duke shifted uneasily in his chair. His whole love and sympathy went out to her, standing there in tears, and he would have given worlds to be able to fold her in his arms and help and comfort her.

"Wisht I could lend you the money," he sighed regretfully, "but I can't. I ain't got a 'y'penny in the world—not a 'y'penny. Couldn't you write to your sister, Patsy, and arsk 'er to 'elp you aout?"

"I wouldn't dare to. I promised her the last time I wouldn't ever bet again," she sobbed, becoming reconciled to him for his sympathy.

"What t'ell," broke in the Shrimp, almost choking himself with a piece of bread, in his disgust. "If there's one thing I hates it's seein' a goil sniv'llin' an' doin' de baby act. What I wants ter know is do I get me five dollar bet, or do I tell——"

"Phwat's that about a bet? Who's bin winnin' foive dollars?"

The questioner, an elderly and somewhat stout person, was Mrs. O'Brien, who had entered with a can of milk.

"Shrimp," replied the Duke promptly before that person could get in a word.

"Ah! and who off a?"

She glanced suspiciously at Nora, who was trying to get rid of the traces of her weeping without attracting attention, while the Duke, with furtive but expressive pantomime was menacing the Shrimp with awful consequences if he dared to betray the girl.

"Phwat are yez cryin' for. Is it bettin' ag'in ye've been up to?" she demanded.

"Me? I'd like to know where I'd get five dollars!" replied Nora evasively.

"Faith, an' so would Oi!" agreed her mother. "But phwat are yez cryin' for, thin?"

"I'm not crying. It was something in my eye," she prevaricated.

"Well, Oi'm sure thankful," said the old woman, satisfied, as she poured the milk into the coffee-cups.

"Oi doan't want another row on me hands, an' ye know full well phwat happened last time yir father caught yez gamblin' at the trials."

The Duke, much relieved, hastened to change the subject.

"'Oo wus the bloke up at the styble with Mr. Mallory just naow?" he asked.

"Search me!" responded the Shrimp.

"Him?" said Mrs. O'Brien, with the air of importance of one who knows, "he's Mister Crawford, Mister Mallory's partner, so yez had bitter be on yir bist behavior whin he's around. *He* won't stand for anny foightin', Oi kin tell ye."

Then, her curiosity getting the better of her, she asked:

"Phwat loike a lookin' man is he?"

"Fair lookin', if you likes 'em big an' mushy," said the Duke. "But most wimmin' *Hi've* known 'as preferred 'em small an' jaunty."

And, rising, he struck a facetious pose by placing his right hand on his chest and raising his right foot until only the tip rested on the floor.

Nora tossed her head contemptuously.

"I think he's real handsome," she declared.

"Did yez see him yit?" questioned her mother, surprised.

"Yes, I did," said Nora proudly, "and I spoke to him, too. He's a real gentleman, and took off his hat to me."

"Took his hat off to yez! For hiv'n's sake!" ejaculated the old woman.

At this moment the door opened and O'Brien entered.

"Still at it, are yez?" he said, as he hung up his cap behind the door. "Be the looks av things it's looky Oi'm here, or it's no brikfast I'd be havin'."

"The 'ash is uncommon fine, sir," volunteered the Duke. "Could I trouble you, Mrs. O'Brien?"

O'Brien took the outheld plate and deposited it on the table.

"Yez has had enough an' to spare. Begone with the lot av yez!" he commanded.

"Patrick! Oi'm surproised at ye," exclaimed his spouse, intervening with a motherly air. "Phwat's the hurry? L'ave the poor darlin's have their fill."

"All roight, woife," assented O'Brien resignedly,

and he seated himself at the table, while Nora hastened to pour out his coffee. After a while, however, he said, as though it had just occurred to him:

"Oh, mother, Danny and Mr. Crawford's goin' to step in on their way from the stables for a cup av yir coffee. They'll be here in a minute."

The woman gazed at him in wrathful astonishment, and her demeanor underwent an entire transformation.

"It's a wonder yez wouldn't say so, instid of kaping it to yirsilf all this toime," she said witheringly. "Here, you bhoys, skedaddle, the lot av ye. Do yez want to sit 'atin' there all day?"

And she waved them toward the door with a peremptory gesture which they lost no time in obeying. Nora already, at the announcement of the coming of Crawford, had vanished up-stairs.

"Now, you, Nora, clear off the dishes, an' you, too, Patrick. Don't be talkin' an' watchin' me do all the wurruk," went on the mistress of the house, although her husband, putting on his knees so as to make room, the plate she had given him, had not opened his mouth to say a word. "Nora! No—ra! Drat the girl!

She's up-stairs primpin' ag'in. She does nothin' else the live-long day, Oi declare!"

"L'ave the choild be! Doan't be naggin' her," protested O'Brien, with audacious petulance.

His better half turned upon him with icy dignity.

"When Oi need yir advice about me own choild, Oi'll ax ye for it," she said. "Here, give this a twist while yir oidlin'."

And snatching the plate from him, she thrust a coffee-mill into his hands.

O'Brien did not relish this summary ending of his meal, nor was he pleased at being pressed thus unceremoniously into the service of preparation. Moreover, if there was one job he disliked more than another it was grinding coffee in the absurdly inadequate utensil employed by the women of the household. All of which brought him into prompt acquiescence in the view that his daughter's proper place was in the kitchen helping her mother. Wherefore, he in turn lifted up his voice and called loudly for her. Mrs. O'Brien, with disconcerting alacrity, changed her attitude and capped the first snub with a double revenge for the reproof under which she was still smarting.

"Can't yez l'ave her alone?" she asked scornfully. "It's the queer girl she'd be entoirely if she didn't want to spruce up a bit whin a strange young man comes callin'."

But Nora had responded to her father's summons, and came down hooking the waistband of her skirt.

"I never saw such a place," she grumbled. "A person can't even get time to dress in this house. What do you want now?"

"Here, groind this coffee," ordered her father.

"Groind it yirsilf, Patrick," interposed his wife sharply. "I want Nora to set the table for Mister Crawford."

Whatever O'Brien's thoughts and feelings may have been, he did not give utterance to them. Perhaps words failed him, or, what was more likely, he had learned by long experience that silence in the end paid better than argument and compliance than resistance; so, filling his pipe, he went on stoically with his task.

Nora, however, was in no mood for docile obedience. She was harboring what she imagined—especially since she had seen the gentlemanly stranger

from New York—to be a crying grievance, and was bent on airing it.

“I’m sick and tired of it,” she declared.

“Sick an’ toired av phwat?” queried her mother stopping and eyeing her, her arms akimbo, while the girl sulkily went on getting the clean cups and saucers.

“Of this work,” said the girl.

“An’ why shouldn’t ye wurruk, Oi’d loike to know! Ye’re a wurrukin’ man’s daughter. Oi wurruk. An’ doan’t yir sister wurruk, poor girl?”

“Poor girl!” sneered Nora. “I’d like to trade places with her.”

“Oh, ye would, would ye? An’ who d’ye think ’u’d give yez a job on the stage? An’ why would yez think yez was cut out to be an actress? Sure, yez can’t sing or dance, like Patricia. *She* takes after *me*, while ye’re the livin’ spit of yir father.”

“I’m lots prettier than she is,” asserted Nora, with a pout, as she shot a rapid glance at herself in the mirror.

“Prettier, indade!” cried her mother, raising her hands. “There ye go ag’in, loike yir father. Both of yez is settin’ up now as the beauties av the fambly.”

"Patsy herself says that if she had my face she'd have every soubrette on Broadway beat a mile," insisted the girl. "I don't think it's fair to expect me to spend my life waiting hand and foot on a lot of dirty stable-boys and Patsy having all the clothes she wants and off enjoying herself."

"Ain't she always sendin' you things!"

"Cast offs!"

"Cast offs! Mercy me, there's gratitude! An' do yez call gallivantin' all over the country with the 'Moonlight Maids' enjoymint?"

"I'd like to try it, for a change, and if I have to earn my living——"

"Phwat d'ye mean, earn yir livin'? Who said anny-thing about earnin' yir living, choild?"

"Daddy said I'd soon have need to be thinking of it."

"Oh, he did, did he!" commented the old woman, with an ominous look at her husband. "Let him pay attintion to his horses. I'll run me children. An' that'll be about all av that. Go around to the pantry and fitch the butter."

O'Brien scented another storm gathering about his devoted head, and as soon as the girl's back was turned it broke upon him.

"It's you that's spoilin' her, puttin' this nonsense into her hid about goin' on the stage," began his wife fiercely.

He answered her with a calmness and assurance that gave her choler pause.

"Oh, the oidea's not a bad one. It's good money Patsy's earnin'," he said.

"But I misdoubt Nora's knowing how——" she began falteringly.

He cut her short, quick to push home his advantage of superiority.

"Phwat talk have ye?" he said, rising and snapping his fingers. "Sure, actin's no trick at all, at all. Oi've seen babies do it!"

Mrs. O'Brien was unable to gainsay this. It was an unanswerable argument. But his triumph was short-lived, for she fell back upon the weapon to which every woman has recourse when all else has failed—tears.

"Sure, it's glib ye are to have them l'ave me!" she wailed. "No wan thinks of a mother's heart. Me baby's goin' to l'ave me!"

O'Brien descended from his perch incontinently.

"Whist, woman—whist—she ain't gone yit!" he reminded her soothingly.

"But—she—will! Oh——"

And at the thought of it she gave way to a violent paroxysm of weeping that filled him with consternation.

"Whist—sure, Mister Crawford'll be here anny minute. I doan't want him to think I've been abusin' ye," he appealed entreatingly.

Mrs. O'Brien dried her eyes.

"Phwat sort is this Crawford?" she asked.

"Oi've tuk a disloike to him," he said, shaking his head.

Mrs. O'Brien recovered her equanimity and resumed her customary domination.

"Thin God prisarve us all! Ye'll glory in showin' it!" she commented.

"No, Oi'm l'arnin' diplomacy," he ventured, scratching a match on his trousers and lighting his pipe.

"It's hoigh toime," she retorted. "Use a bit av it now and thin. Was it you invoited him over?"

"It was not. He's comin' for a cup of coffee to take the chill off."

"I suppose you was braggin' about me coffee?" she said, with gratified anticipation.

"I *was* not!" he replied emphatically.

"An' why not, pray?" she wanted to know, bridling up again. "Ye moight know ye'd niver say a good wurrud for a body!"

"It was Mallory," he explained.

"Me bhoy Dan! Bliss his heart! Dan——"

She stopped abruptly. Through the window she had caught sight of a man approaching.

"Here comes Crawford!" she said hurriedly. "Now smoile, though ye could choke him!"

CHAPTER IV.

O'Brien threw open the door, and Crawford entered. As he did so Nora, who had made her way upstairs again, came down in all the glory of fresh pink bows and ribbons. She had been sorely tempted to don her Sunday clothes, but had not dared to do so, fearing her mother's displeasure.

"Come roight in, sor, an' welcome," said O'Brien. "Woife, this is Mister Crawford."

Crawford bared his head and bowed to her, then bowed to Nora with a smile of recognition.

"'Tis an honor to know ye, sor," said Mrs. O'Brien graciously.

Then, indicating Nora with her thumb, she added:

"Ye've already seen me baby."

"Baby! Oh, mother, the idea!" exclaimed Nora, abashed, while the visitor admitted that he had had the pleasure of meeting her.

"Take the gentleman's coat, Nora. Draw up yir chair, Mister Crawford. Woife, pour the coffee," directed O'Brien, assuming the command.

"I'm afraid you have been put to a lot of trouble, Mrs. O'Brien," said Crawford considerably.

"Sure Oi loike to fuss for anny man that appreciates it," she assured him, with a condescending smile.

O'Brien gave a sniff that was so eloquent in its derisive significance that it brought him a swift glance of menace.

"But where's Danny bhoy?" she continued.

"She means Mallory. 'Tis foolish she is about him," explained her husband.

"He was detained at the stable. He said he would be here presently," replied Crawford.

The visitor sipped his coffee and gazed around with polite interest.

"Is this all your family, Mrs. O'Brien?" he asked.

"Oh, no," answered Nora for her. "There's Patsy."

"How nice," he said. "A girl and a boy. That makes the family complete."

"Phwy, no!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Brien, with a laugh in which her husband and daughter joined. "It's her

sister, Patricia. Nora, run and git her photograph for the gintleman—git the one in costume—it's in the lower drawer. Lift up the waist av me black silk. It's wrapped in the Paisley shawl," she precised, seizing the opportunity to let her visitor know that she possessed, and on occasion could attire herself in, expensive and gorgeous raiment.

"And, Nora," called O'Brien, as the girl disappeared, "look in me hat-box. Ye'll foind a couple av——"

"Father," chided his wife, "the gintleman'll think ye're daft. Sure, one's enough."

"Not at all. I am very much interested, and would like to see them all," declared Crawford, highly amused.

"Thin, Patrick, ye may as well stip into the parlor an' bring the enlargement," she said.

"Patsy is rather an odd name for a girl," observed Crawford, left alone with Mrs. O'Brien.

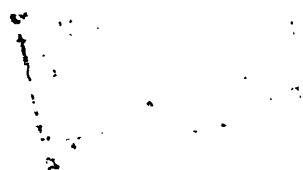
"She's named for Patrick," she explained.

"Oh, I see. Sort of substitute for a son!" he laughed.

"A substitute, is it? Sure, Oi wouldn't take a half



"SHE MUST BE A VERY PRETTY GIRL," HE OPINED. *Page 49.*



a dozen of the lovin' sons me fri'nds has for the loikes o' Patsy," declared the mother, with tender earnestness.

O'Brien returned bearing a crayon bust-portrait of the common or garden variety, highly tinted, and encased in a huge gilt frame with an inner border of red plush. He handled it with the precaution he would have employed in carrying a \$10,000 Sèvres vase, and held it in various positions so that the visitor could get the full force of its staggering effect. Crawford affected to be overwhelmed with admiration.

"She must be a very pretty girl," he opined.

"Oi've seen homelier," admitted O'Brien, swelling with pride.

In manœuvring the picture he almost let it fall through excess of caution.

"Kape still. Doan't be squeegeen' it an' bobbin' it! Ye fair dazzle wan!" said his wife. Then to Crawford:

"It's a rale decaivin' thing. Whin she's away from me Oi think it's the livin' image av her; but whin she's alongside——"

"It's the difference in the coloring," suggested Crawford.

"Patsy says it gives her the willies," cut in Nora, who had returned with the small photographs.

Crawford laughed merrily, and took one that the girl extended to him.

"Ah, taken in fancy costume."

"No, them's her wurrakin' clothes," said O'Brien, and as Crawford, surprised, looked at him interrogatively, he explained: "She's on the stage."

"I see; an actress," said Crawford perspicaciously.

"Oh, not at all. She's a Queen av Burlesque," corrected O'Brien, with loftiness.

"With the 'Moonlight Maids,'" added his wife.

"Perhaps you've heard of them?" queried Nora.

Crawford had never heard of them in his life, but he would not have avowed his ignorance for the world, so he answered, with an air of conviction:

"Oh, yes, a very fine company—lots of clever people."

"They pays Patsy twinty a week," went on O'Brien, becoming more and more confidential.

"*And* her costumes," his wife reminded him.

"Well, *they* don't amount to much," remarked Crawford, examining the scantily clad figures in the photographs.

This little joke was quite lost upon the family, and Mrs. O'Brien began a spirited defense of the costliness of the costumes.

"Oi've seen few grand ladies with foiner silks on their backs," she declared.

"Sure," said O'Brien, backing her up stoutly. "The stockin's are all silk, an' that long."

And he indicated with his outstretched hands a prodigious length of hose. He was preparing further to discant upon the value and attractiveness of his daughter's theatrical attire when the door was flung open, and the Duke appeared.

"I—hytes—to—hintrude," he apologized breathlessly, "but 'ere's a telegram—for Mrs. O'Brien."

He thrust it into her hands and went away as hurriedly as he had come.

Mrs. O'Brien turned the paper over for an instant in blank amazement. Then she became pale and collapsed into a chair.

"She's killed! She's killed!" she shrieked. "Oh, the black day Oi let me Patsy go trapesin' all over the country!"

O'Brien, who had gone into the parlor to replace the precious picture on the wall, rushed back.

"Phwat ails ye?" he demanded, in great alarm.

"Oi have a tiligram. She's killed! My Patsy's killed!" moaned the old woman, while the tears streamed down her face in a veritable flood.

"Wouldn't it be as well to open it?" suggested Crawford drily.

O'Brien grabbed the telegram and tore it open, but his wife snatched it back indignantly.

"Oh, *is* she alive?" supplicated Nora, who had remained petrified with consternation.

"Praise be, she *is*! It's soigned 'Patsy,'" announced her mother.

Then, while O'Brien heaved a great sigh of relief, she read aloud:

"'Show's on the'—on the—I can't make it out. It looks loike p-a-z-a-z."

"That's right," explained Crawford, to the sorely puzzled family. "On the pazaz—Tenderloinese for on

the blink." He added to make it perfectly clear to them: "She means that the show is no good—that it has busted, in a word."

But Mrs. O'Brien, at the next few words of the telegram, sat bolt upright.

"'Coming on the seven-six. Me for home and mother.' Wake up, Patrick O'Brien! Don't stand there like the ninny ye are! It's half-past sivin now, an' yir poor choild's waitin' in the cold daypo!"

She leaped to her feet.

O'Brien, as the significance of it had dawned upon him, had become wildly excited.

"Nora," he shouted, "where's me overcoat? Woife, where's me hat? You'll excuse me, sor, Oi must go hitch up."

But his wife brought him up short with a round turn, and put a quick, effectual damper on his zeal.

"Hold yir hosses!" she directed. "Ye'll go ask Danny to meet her. It's dyin' glad av the chance he'll be. Oi've use for yez here."

"Use for me here? An' what'll Nora be doin'?" he demanded.

"Nora'll be entertainin' Mister Crawford."

"Oh, you mustn't let me interfere," said the latter diffidently.

"Not at all. It's a man's wurruk Oi've got for him," she said.

"What wurruk?" asked O'Brien sulkily.

The woman gazed at him severely.

"If yez must compel me to revale the secrits av the home, the spare room bed's to be put up," came in scathing tones.

O'Brien departed to deliver his message to Mallory, and Crawford rose.

"I fear I am in the way," he observed.

"Not at all, not at all, Mister Crawford," said the old woman heartily. "Make yirself at home. Stop an' have a bit of a chat with Nora. She'll have a chance to say a wurrud for hersilf, now her mother's l'avin' the room."

She went out, and Crawford and the "wild rose" were alone. He watched her a while at her work of clearing the table, and for once in his life was at a loss what to say. She was entirely different from the women of his class—and from the women not of his class with whom he associated.

"So it's your sister and Mallory, eh? I shall have to congratulate him," he ventured, feeling that he must say something. "I am going to be his partner, you know."

"Isn't that nice!" exclaimed the girl. "Dan's a fine man, and he'll make a good husband. Mom says good husbands are awful scarce."

"I wouldn't worry about that, if I were you," he laughed, amused at her candor and naïveté.

"I'm not worrying," she told him. "I'm going on the stage."

"That's not a bad place to get husbands these days," he said.

"Oh," she protested, "but I'm not going on the stage to get married."

"No? Oh, I see, for fame."

He smiled at her, more and more amused.

"No, indeed," she said decidedly, "for twenty dollars a week. Just think of all the pretty clothes you can buy for that."

"Can you? I wish I had known it!" he laughed, having in mind sundry dressmakers' bills he had settled since his début in the world *où l'on s'amuse*.

"Patsy says I ought to stay at home—that I don't know when I'm well off," she confided, growing more bold and friendly as the conversation proceeded.

"I fear I agree with Patsy," he said gravely.

She looked at him with a pout of disappointment and displeasure.

"That's all very well. But how would you like to wear your sister's old dresses?"

"I don't think I would like it," he avowed, his eyes lighting up with a smile again.

"There—you see!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "Patsy or no Patsy, I'm going to New York."

Crawford was a *viveur*, of that kind very common in great cities, who affect to believe that all is fair in love—as they conceive it—and are ever in quest of *bonnes fortunes*. To do him justice, however, he had not thought of his little companion save in an entirely disinterested way. He had considered her as a beautiful child, as a "wild rose," but the idea that the rose might be plucked had not even entered his mind, and when he had told her that he agreed with her sister that home was the best place for her he had really meant it. But the turn the conversation had taken

had quickened his imagination, diverted his ideas into another channel and opened his eyes to possibilities. He began to estimate her with the calculation of a connoisseur in the art of seduction. Here was a girl shapely and unusually pretty, whose charms were enhanced by an innocence that was as childlike as it was captivating, not to be found in any girl, however good, who had been brought into contact with the experience of the city school or workshop. The sister of an actress, she was bent on going on the stage, and in New York, the flame to which so many moths like her had fluttered and been singed. Why should he not endeavor to take advantage of his opportunity? Why put from him the good thing luck had thrown in his way? Patsy or no Patsy, she was going to New York—and on the stage!

"You might not like it," he said, rising to help her fold the tablecloth.

"Not like New York!" she ejaculated, astonished at the notion. "The idea! Why, even Patsy, who *loves* the country, says New York's the one best bet."

"It's a pretty good little town," he agreed, folding her hands in the cloth and gazing straight into her

eyes. "Yet I haven't enjoyed myself so much in a long while as I have this morning."

The girl averted her gaze and blushed, and he relaxed his clasp.

"Did you see all the horses?" she asked, not comprehending the meaning he had essayed to put into the words. "Which one did you like most?"

"They are a fine string, but I think Lady Belle hit my eye."

"Isn't she a beauty? I love her!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "But," she added, suddenly recollecting her trouble over the mare and becoming resentful, "she doesn't get any sugar from me *this* morning."

"No? Why not?"

"Because she lost me five dollars to the Shrimp."

"The Shrimp!"

"Yes, he's one of the stable-boys."

"Oh! So you bet, then?"

"I love to—but I shouldn't have told you that."

"Why not?"

"It might hurt father in your eyes."

"How so?"

"He thinks it dishonorable for any of us, he being a trainer, to put money on a horse. I don't know what he'd do if he found out I'd disobeyed him again."

"I won't tell him," he laughed.

"But the Shrimp will if I don't pay him. I don't know what I'm going to do," she said ruefully.

He went close to her.

"Let me lend it to you," he murmured.

Nora turned away in great embarrassment.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford. I wasn't hinting—I couldn't think of taking money from you. What would father say if he found it out?"

"He needn't know. Why should he?" he insisted.

"But you're a stranger," she objected.

"A stranger! Don't say that. Why, I feel as though I had known you all my life. Besides, as I am to be Mallory's partner I am also going to be a friend of the family, you know."

The girl reflected.

"Yes—of course. I suppose so—you're not quite a stranger," she said doubtfully. "You're sure it

would be all right for a girl to borrow money from a gentleman?"

"Most certainly," he assured her.

Nora still hesitated, but she wanted to take the money.

"Of course—I could pay you back—some time," she faltered.

"That's all right," he said genially. "There's no hurry about it. I sha'n't need it for ever so long."

And going to his overcoat hanging on the door he drew from the inside pocket a roll of bills.

As he did so Mrs. O'Brien came down-stairs.

"Mother! Oh, don't let her see!" entreated the girl, in terror.

Crawford thrust the money back into his pocket and pretended to be taking down his coat.

"Nora," said her mother, "I want ye to come up-stairs an' dust——"

She broke off short, seeing Crawford putting on his coat.

"Sure, Oi'm not meanin' to drive yez away, sor," she said. "It's proud Oi'd be to introduce ye to Patsy."

"Thank you," he responded cordially. "I shall be delighted. I'll be back in a little while."

Nora, following her mother up-stairs, turned to look at him, and he cast a swift, meaning glance at her as he went out.

CHAPTER V.

"I useter think I was the big screech in this family, but it looks like I'm the false alarm!"

Patricia O'Brien gazed around the deserted kitchen with mingled ire and disappointment as she delivered herself of this sentiment and deposited a suit-case and an umbrella on the floor.

"Wouldn't this frost you, though," she muttered, "me havin' to beat it all the way from the deepo an' then not a soul to offer me the welcome mitt!"

She went to the foot of the stairs and lifted up her voice in a strident "Ooo-ho! Ooo-ho!" Then she returned and seated herself wearily on a chair.

Little excited cries in the regions above, and a sound of hurrying feet followed this call.

"'Tis Patsy! 'Tis Patsy! Hurry, Nora!" shrieked Mrs. O'Brien.

The admonition was not needed, for Nora was bounding down two steps at a time, but Patsy called, in the voice of a martyr:

"Oh, don't step lively on my account."

Nora dashed into the kitchen, followed by her mother, and they flung themselves upon her with many exclamations of joy as Patsy rose to greet them.

"Me darlin', me Patsy, 'tis glad Oi am to see yez. Ye're lookin' beautiful, choild," cried the old woman, hugging her to her and receiving in return a hug so strenuous in its expression of long-pent-up and hungry affection that it made her gasp.

The first effusions of the joy of meeting again having moderated, Patsy once more became aggrieved.

"Some one might 'a' met me," she complained, with tears in her voice. "It ain't no joke hot-footin' it all this way with a heavy grip. Where's pop?"

"Phwat! Wasn't there anny wan at the train? Didn't yez see Danny?" queried her mother, much surprised.

"Don't speak his name!" requested the girl, as she divested herself of her short, tan jacket, and revealed her tall, slender figure clad in a white blouse shirt-waist and black taffeta skirt, beneath which, as she raised it slightly, the flounce of a green petticoat was visible. "Didn't you get my wire sayin' I'd be here on the seven-six?"

"Yes, but it wasn't delivered here until half-past seven," said Nora, as she took her sister's hat, a fearful and wonderful creation in black chiffon.

"An' Danny rushed roight away with the rig for the train," added her mother.

"Half-past seven! Wouldn't that scald you? I'm sorry I was so grouchy, but I'm so temperamental."

Patricia emphasized the last word with a very superior air, as she adjusted her pompadour before the mirror and smoothed out her crumpled shirt-waist with her fingers. Her notion as to what it meant was extremely hazy. But she had heard it in a play and it sounded well.

Her mother was much impressed by it.

"Is that so!" she said sympathetically. "Poor dear! But Oi doan't wonder at ye feelin' upset. Sure 'twas a cold welcome yez had from yir loved wans."

"I had it all framed up," Patsy went on, "me descendin' from the caboose an' fallin' on everybody's neck. An' when I gets off the train the only neck in sight belongs to that village cut-up that propels the hack. The worst of it was I'd been handin' it out all season to that bunch of frails in the company about

my fiancé that owns a racin'-stable, and had told 'em I'd wired him to meet me. An' when that rabbit-faced hackman comes up an' hands out his mitt to me—— Well, never to me dyin' day will I forget the way that burlesque crowd hands me the merry ha, ha!"

And she raised her eyes and hands and nodded her head in a manner more expressive of her humiliation and harrowed feelings than any mere words could have been.

"Ye poor lamb! 'Twas a black shame," said her mother.

"But it's good to be home again," sighed Patsy contentedly, dismissing from her thoughts the contretemps that could not be placed to anybody's fault, and giving her mother another affectionate hug. "An' how is things? How's Danny gettin' along?"

"He ain't gettin' along as well as he moight," answered the old woman uneasily. "He's had a hard toime av it ever since the foire, though Lor' knows he's wurrucked hard enough, an' he's had to git a partner."

"A partner?"

"Yes, we didn't wroite to bother yez about it. It wouldn't 'a' helped matters, an' would 'a' set ye wor-ryin', an' ye sure have enough to put up with."

"You oughter 'a' let me know about it, all the same. Who is he—this partner, I mean?"

"A Mister Crawford, from New York. He came here this very mornin' to look the place over. Yir father says it's little Danny'll get out av the stable now except his board an' keep."

"Ain't that punk luck!" commented Patsy. "Well—an' how's pop? I didn't have much money, an' I came away too quick to buy anything for you, but I brought him some tobacco I got at the deepo at Washington."

Before her mother could reply, O'Brien himself came in, his face beaming a welcome. Tears of tender joy moistened his eyes as he took the returned wanderer in his arms.

"Ah, Patsy, but we've missed ye, me girl," he said. "It makes loife worth livin' to see yez once in a whoile. Phwat happened to yir show that ye were able to come to us?"

"The angel, the financial party as was back of the 'Moonlight Maids,' got chilblains," she explained.

"Poor creature! Where did he catch them?" asked her mother, with much interest.

"In the box-office," replied Patsy, with a laugh, in which all joined, including her mother, who began to understand.

"Wasn't the play comical?" asked the latter.

"I never noticed any one laff himself to death," said Patsy, shrugging her shoulders. "The comedians was a couple of morgues. The best joke in the show was the star—one of them hand-made blondes. She was in the original 'Black Crook' Company, an' she had a daughter at school then. Then there was a couple of song-an'-dance kikes, a team of acrobats, a troupe of moth-eaten dogs, an' a chorus that looked like the Chambermaids' Union."

"And wasn't even the scenery nice?" questioned Nora.

"Yep," she admitted, "the scenery *was* nice, and I made a great personal success. I had three lines in the afterpiece."

"Well, never moind, choild. The 'Moonlight Maids' brought us luck in bringin' ye here," said O'Brien; "an' now ye're here, we're goin' to keep yez a while."

"I'd like to stay awful bad, but I'm afraid I can't, pop, dear," she said. "I've got to go back to New York to-morrow."

"But ye can't l'ave us so soon," protested her mother.

"Mom," she replied, with an air of businesslike importance, "you don't understand. I simply can't keep men like Henry W. Savage and Klaw and Erlanger waitin' to know what I'm goin' to do."

"Will you have a part in a play?" queried Nora.

"That depends on the part. Like as not I'll just go back in the chorus. What's the use of bein' ambitious? It only makes you uncomfortable in your mind. I've thought some of goin' into vaudeville. I've a friend that's close to B. F. Keith's stenographer, an' he thought he could book me some dates. Maybe I'll frame up a sister act."

"A sister act! Oh, Pat, you're going to take me!" cried Nora eagerly.

"Why, honey lamb," said Patsy, with loving, motherly deprecation, "you couldn't do a turn in vaudeville. The stage is no place for you."

Nora flushed and glared at her sister with jealous fury.

"You needn't think you're the only person in this family that can do anything," she retorted. "You're jealous because I'm better-looking than you are. I'll go in the chorus, too, just to spite you—you see if I don't!"

And bursting into a fit of angry weeping she bounced out of the room.

Patsy, amazed and pained and anxious to soothe her sister, followed her to the foot of the stairs.

"Why, Nora—honey lamb!" she cried. "Come here, child, I——"

"Honey lamb nothing!" screamed the enraged girl, as she slammed the door of her room. "I'll go in the chorus just to spite you."

Patsy, perturbed and distressed, turned back.

"Mom, you haven't been encouragin' her? Pop, you won't let her go?" she questioned.

Mrs. O'Brien remained silent, and looked inquiringly at her husband. Although in the ordinary conduct of household affairs she ruled supreme, in times of crises or when it came to the decision of weighty matters, she looked, womanlike, to her husband for counsel and action.

O'Brien puffed at his pipe and reflected. It seemed to him very natural that Nora should desire to follow in her sister's footsteps, and he was unable to see any objection to such a course.

"She's got to be thinkin' av earnin' her livin'," he observed.

"Nix for the stage, pop," said Patsy. "She ain't wise to takin' care of herself."

"Phwat d'ye mean, choild?" demanded her mother.

"I mean," answered Patsy emphatically, "I don't want my little sister in the chorus."

"If it ain't fit for Nora, it ain't fit for you, and it's here ye'll stay," declared O'Brien, very quietly and very firmly.

She went to him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear old pop, you don't understand. The chorus is all right, all right. As I've told you before, like everything else, it depends on the kind of person that goes into it. An' she's such a baby, an' so sweet, it seems a shame she can't stay home till she marries some nice feller."

"Sure you done pretty well," her mother reminded her.

"Me? Oh, I'm different," said the girl. "I'm wise. I can tell the goods from the phoney every time."

"Couldn't ye teach Nora?"

"I'd just as lief she wouldn't learn."

"Ah, Patsy, me darlin', you're forgettin'. It's a lesson women must learn, somehow, somewhere, some day. Better you nor some one else to stand by an' watch she ain't harmed."

Patsy sighed.

"True," she said slowly. "Maybe you're right, mom, after all."

"Ye're as good as gold. I'd trust yez annywhere," declared the old woman fondly.

Patsy made a little gesture of affectionate reproof.

"Your sure strong with the blarney, ain't she, pop?" she laughed.

"No blarney at all," denied her mother. "But it's dyin' ye must be for a cup of tay an' yir brikfast. I'll get it for yez at wanst."

"Whist!" exclaimed O'Brien, "here's a rig com-in'."

"I've a hunch that's Dan. Skidoo, pop," cried Patsy, kissing him hastily and pushing him toward the door. "That goes for you, too, mom. I guess I don't need no chaperony."

CHAPTER VI.

Patricia O'Brien's love was of that kind which is a woman's whole existence. Germinating on that day five years before when, a stranger, Mallory had smiled into her eyes, it had grown into a passion that filled every waking hour of her life, a passion that absence had but purified and ennobled. It may not have found utterance in words with which a Keats or a Shelley would have molded stanzas of deathless beauty. It may not have manifested itself in that sentimentality which is the usual outward and visible symptom of the lovelorn. But in her little heart it burned with a bright flame that was the guiding light, the beacon, which enabled her to hold straight on her way through the multitudinous shoals of temptation which surrounded her on every hand, and outshone the glitter of the gold that might have been hers had she allowed herself to deviate from her course.

She had been a long time away, and had been very hungry for a sight of Mallory's face and the strong, protecting clasp of his arm. The moment for which

she had so yearned, that would recompense her for all the trials and troubles she had had to endure in the course of the disastrous tour of the "Moonlight Maids," had arrived.

"Do — you know — you're — takin' — my breath away?" she gasped between the kisses he planted avidly on her lips.

"Am I?" he said, and he kissed her again and again.

Patsy heaved a sigh of great happiness, and snuggled her head on his broad shoulder.

"After seventeen weeks touring imitation towns, this is certainly peach-preserves," she murmured.

"It's heaven! To me you're the one girl in the whole damned universe," he declared fervently.

"When I think of the men I see other women stacked up against—you win—easy."

"I never saw anything that was in your class, Patsy. You look like a four-time winner yourself."

"Honest, Dan?"

"You're prettier than ever."

"I do think this way of wearin' my hair is becomin'," she avowed, going to the mirror and adjusting her ample pompadour.

"Becomin'! It's beautiful! You're beautiful! Everything about you's beautiful!" he declared enthusiastically.

The girl regarded him quizzically.

"Say—ain't you afraid of gettin' pinched for pedlin' hot air without a license?" she said.

"It ain't hot air, it's God's truth. Gee! but it's good to look at you. You don't know how I miss you, dear."

"Don't I? You missed me this mornin' good an' plenty. I'm supposed to have a mad at you."

"It was too bad, wasn't it? But never mind, the main thing is that you're here. How long are you goin' to stay?"

"I must hump back to the real puddle to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Why?"

"To connect. The 'Moonlight Maids' goes into cold storage."

"So I gathered. Seems to be a bad season for shows."

"It's always a bad season for bad shows with bum backin'."

At the news that she was so soon to leave again a look of keen disappointment had come into Dan's eyes, and he had become grave. It was hard after such a long separation to part again so quickly, and for a moment she who had borne so much so bravely shared his discouragement.

"This everlastin' huntin' a job gets on my nerves," she said dejectedly. "I'm tired of it, tired of missin' you, Dan; tired of seein' you only once in a dog's age."

"So am I, sick to death of missin' you an' longin' for you, an' I won't have you go. Marry me now, Patsy. We'll get along, somehow."

He went to her and put his arm around her.

"Say yes," he entreated.

Patsy leaned her head wearily on his breast, and remained silent, sorely tempted to acquiesce and end it all.

"Say yes," he urged, stroking her hair back from her forehead caressingly. "What's the use of waitin'?"

"An' put a crimp in your prospects?" she exclaimed suddenly, looking up at him. "No, Dan, I ain't such

a weak-minded slob as that. I was foolish to let that rave outer me. I'm just tired, that's all."

"It breaks me all up," he said, with a sob in his voice. "I know we could make it a go."

She shook her head.

"Not by beginnin' wrong on the money proposition, boy. Just how do we stand? Mom's been hintin'—but let's get down to cases."

With a businesslike air she seated herself at the table, and he took a chair opposite to her.

"It started at Sheepshead," he began. "I thought I had a string of good ones——"

"An' they turned out skates."

"Yes. I didn't pull off a purse that was more than chicken-feed. I had to take in a partner, and it doesn't look like I'll earn more than my keep for the next six months."

"How's this Crawford goin' to boost your game?"

"He's lent me money, an' I've given him a half-interest in the stables, an' a mortgage on the rest as security for the loan. It was a case of take some one in or get out myself. But we've some promising youngsters that ought to bring a good price. Then I'll pay

him up, or sell out to him. Anyhow, I'm goin' to quit this game. Me for a stock-farm."

Patsy stroked her chin dubiously.

"A stock-farm! Where'd pop an' the folks get off?"

"They'd come right along with us, of course."

For some minutes neither spoke. Both were absorbed in their reflections. Patsy had unbounded faith in Dan's judgment. Whenever he had decided upon any enterprise, she had always given him the support of her encouragement, and had interposed no "buts" or "ifs." But somehow this stock-farm idea did not quite appeal to her, with the visions of rural seclusion it evoked. She was fond of the country, to be sure, but not of too much of it. In the five years of her very active life in the theatrical profession she had become accustomed to the changes of scene incidental to going "on the road," and insensibly enjoyment of the bustle and excitement of city life had grown upon her. She was able to hold her own in it, and felt the need of it. For the stage itself she cared little—she regarded it merely as the stepping-stone to that higher domestic existence to which she looked

forward with such hope and longing. But she had never associated this existence with a retreat very far from the paths beaten by the "maddin' crowd." Life on a farm "out of the world" had never entered into her calculations.

"Then we'd settle down like a couple of Reubens—us an' the cows," she commented, at length, without enthusiasm.

"Not cows—horses," he explained.

"No more playin' dates at Sheepshead or New Orleans?"

"No travel at all. Just stayin' home."

"Just stayin' home! Oh, Dan! do you s'pose it would last?"

He looked at her in great surprise.

"Why, sure," he said.

"I dunno," she continued doubtfully, shaking her head. "I've met more than one doll who has thrown a man down hard just to get back to the bright lights. They handed out a lot of junk about love for their art, when it was nothin' but a hankerin' for the excitement. Dan, I ain't no better than any one else. I'm kinder afraid."

Dan smiled at her fondly and pooh-poohed her apprehensions.

"You ain't no doll, and you're a million times better than other girls," he said. "*I'm* not afraid. I know you love me."

"That last part's no idle dream," she responded.

"An' that's what counts," he said reassuringly. "Don't you go gettin' all stewed up."

"It ain't my fault. I'm a little up-stage to-day. I'm upset in me mind."

She rose and paced the room nervously.

"Anything gone wrong?" he interrogated anxiously, rising also.

"Nora's thrown a scare into me."

"Nora?"

"Yes. She's got a stage career all doped out, an' mom an' pop's been lettin' her dream. An' it's all dead wrong."

"What's wrong about it?"

"Every old thing. Say, don't tell me you've encouraged her, too?"

"O'Brien asked my advice, an' I didn't see anything to stop her."

"Well, you are a lot of yaps," declared Patsy emphatically. "Can't you see she ain't to be trusted outside the front yard? Not that she ain't good and sweet, but she ain't got any head. I don't know where she gets it, but she's shy on knowin' the difference between right an' wrong."

"But if she went with you, Patsy——"

"I can't stay with her, Dan. How can I? I'm comin' to you."

"She's all right," he said, with conviction, taking her hands.

"No," dissented Patsy. "I've seen too many, just her kind, sweet an' pretty, begin well an' end bad."

"If it's as bad as that the stage is no place for you, and I'm not goin' to have you return to it," he announced firmly.

"What do you mean, Dan Mallory?" she demanded, staring blankly at him. "I didn't say every girl was bad, or wanted to be. Do you think I—— Oh! Dan—that hurts—that hurts!"

She turned away, and he followed her contritely.

"I'm sorry, Patsy. I didn't mean that. You know—I trust you—but you're a long way from us, an' I

get to worryin' sometimes for fear some rich feller'll want to marry you."

"Well, no rich feller does," she laughed. "Though I'm a chump to put you next to the fact. You're the only man as wants me, an' you can't lose me, Mr. Mallory."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"I guess we'll tandem pretty well," he said. "Now give me another kiss, just to keep me goin'. I've got to join Crawford. He'll wonder what's become of me."


"Nix," she answered playfully, breaking away from him. "You'll have to come back for it."

He went out, and she gazed after him through the window, her whole soul beaming in her eyes.

"He's the goods, all right," she murmured.

CHAPTER VII.

Patsy stood at the window long after Mallory had disappeared in the direction of the stables, giving free rein to her thoughts, and they were not all precisely cheerful in character. She had known that Mallory's ill luck with the horses and the burning of the stables had been a serious setback, but just how serious it was she had never realized, her anxiety having been dispelled by the cheery, optimistic letters she had received from Dan and her parents. Dan had decided that it was better that she should be kept in ignorance of the real state of affairs as long as possible. It was not necessary, he had said, that she should worry with them, and he hoped for a change of fortune that would enable him to recoup some of his losses. Patsy had understood at once the delicacy of the sentiment that had actuated him in withholding the truth from her, and during their *tête-à-tête* she had refrained, with an equal generosity, from uttering one word of reproach, although she felt that she ought to have been taken into his confidence. As the situation stood, after



all these years of effort and waiting, they appeared to be as far as ever from the realization of their hopes, which, up to her visit home, she had believed to be near.

Moreover, the stock-farm project filled her with doubt and misgiving. She was unable to see how, if he could not make a success of a racing-stable, which it had been his great ambition to own, Dan would be able to attain his goal through the medium of the stock-farm, and the change in the roseate plans for their future, as they had so often discussed them, did not commend itself to her. Indeed, it had filled her with deep disappointment. She had seen herself as a successful trainer's wife, attending the race-meets all over the country, and basking in her husband's glory when the horses he had trained should carry his colors, or the colors of their owners, to victory in the great events. And she had had day-dreams, in which she had beheld certain of her high-flying associates of the boards dying of envy as they paid court to Mrs. Daniel Mallory at the track.

And to cap her worries and perplexities, here was the little sister she idolized, and for whom she had

dreamed of assuming the rôle of fairy-godmother, stage-struck and bent on going to New York. This was the very last thing she would have desired for her. As Patsy had mapped it out, Nora was to have remained at home, the spoiled child of the family, until some virtuous—and well-to-do—young man should lead her thence to the altar. Instead, the girl had savagely resented the tracing for her of any course she herself did not want to follow. This was a Nora she did not know and never had imagined, a Nora to be reckoned with. The outburst of an hour before still wounded and pained.

The very day, for which she had waited so impatiently that for two nights she had scarcely slept, had begun wrong with her humiliating arrival at the railroad-station.

"Isn't it the punkety-punkest?" she soliloquized. "Looks like luck's givin' me the double-cross, and I'm gettin' the lemon all around. Talk about patience! It's enough to give even Job's think-tank a jolt."

She turned from the window to seek her mother, when Nora came into the room. The girl was shame-faced and embarrassed.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Patsy," she stammered. "I oughtn't to—I didn't mean—indeed——"

Her contrition sufficed in an instant to dispel any resentment at her treatment that may have rankled in Patsy's mind, and her love welled up and went out in a burst of tenderness that exonerated her sister, and made her feel that somehow she herself had been to blame.

"Me, too," she said. "I didn't mean to sit all over you, little one. Forgive me, won't you?"

"And you'll take me with you to-morrow?" questioned Nora, brightening up.

"We'll see," answered Patsy gravely. "We'll have a talk about it all, an' maybe then you won't want to go. Where's mom?"

Nora told her that her mother was in the spare room, and when her sister had gone out she set about putting the kitchen in order.

"Maybe I will want to go," she muttered; "and I *am* going, if not to-morrow, then some other time. I'm going to earn money like you, and I'm going to wear dresses like you."

There was a knock at the door, and she went to open it. Crawford, smiling, entered.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford!" said the girl, confused. "You've come to meet Patsy. I'll call her."

"Hold on, don't be in a hurry about it," he said genially. "I want to give you that money first."

He drew the roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off one of five dollars, and handed it to her.

"No, thank you, Mr. Crawford," she said, drawing back. "You are very kind, but I've been thinking over it, and it doesn't seem right."

"No? Why, that's nonsense," he insisted. "You had better take it before anybody comes in and interrupts us again."

"Oh, I couldn't, really," she protested, less firmly.

"Has your sister helped you?" he inquired.

"No, I didn't ask her—I didn't dare," she replied.

"Well, then, you still owe the money to—to—the—er—Shrimp?"

She nodded affirmatively.

"Let me think," he said. He pursed his lips and frowned, as though concentrating his thoughts upon a matter of weighty moment.

"Ah!" he ejaculated suddenly, his brow unwrinkling and his face lighting up with his cheery smile. "How about winning it back?"

"Winning it?" she exclaimed wonderingly.

"Yes. Suppose you lay another wager—or, rather, suppose you let me lay another wager for you."

"But I mightn't win, and I'd be worse off than ever."

"Impossible! You couldn't lose. I'll give you a sure thing. I'll put up five dollars, and I think I can get four to one—yes, I'm sure I can."

"Why, I'd have twenty dollars!" cried the girl delightedly. "Are you sure I couldn't lose?"

"Of course—positive."

He moved close to her, intending to press the money on her then on the pretext that as she couldn't lose she might as well take it without waiting for the supposed race, but it occurred to him that the wager would be an excuse for him to renew confidential relations when he came again, so he said:

"It's understood—it's a go. I will run down here again at the end of the week, and I'll bring a new, crisp twenty-dollar bill with me."

"Oh, no, I never could change it," she objected. "Nobody must know I've got so much money. Couldn't you give it to me in smaller bills?"

"Certainly! You shall have it any way you like," he promised.

Nora, her head turned at the prospect of possessing so much wealth, had forgotten her determination to go to New York with her sister the following day. She suddenly recollected it.

"I forgot," she said. "I mightn't be here. Patsy may take me to New York to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

He almost started with surprise. He had not imagined that it could possibly be so soon.

"Well, it won't matter," he said, "if she does, come to my office. Here's my address—perhaps it would be as well if you didn't let anybody see the card. If you shouldn't come to New York, why, I'll be here."

"It's too bad for you to take all that trouble," she declared gratefully.

"I'd take more trouble than that to see you," he murmured gently, bending toward her.

She looked straight at him, her cheeks suffused with blushes.

"You're awful sweet about it," she said.

A curious burning look came into his eyes as her gaze met his. She appeared very pretty and tempting. Her lips, full and ripe, were parted so that they afforded just a glimpse of her white, even teeth.

"So are you—awfully sweet."

The words came in tones so soft that they were almost a whisper. He bent still lower to kiss her, and, scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she raised her lips to meet his.

Patsy, entering from the passage at this moment, witnessed the kiss, and for a second stood petrified, incapable of movement. Then she walked straight in.

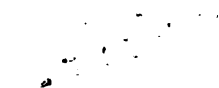
Nora, quick as a flash, backed away from Crawford, and with a presence of mind that Patsy never would have credited her with, and which was another revelation, turned to her, saying:

"Oh, Patsy, this is Mr. Crawford."

"Delighted to meet you," she said, with biting irony, as Crawford bowed. "This your first visit?"



"YOU'RE AWFUL SWEET ABOUT IT," SHE SAID.



Crawford realized that he had met an enemy, and an enemy that was not to be despised.

"Yes," he answered, with easy defiance, "my first visit—but not my last."

Patsy was as pale as marble. Her nostrils were contracted and her lips compressed ominously, as she looked him over.

"That so?" she returned. "Nora, go pack your trunk."

Nora, who had been badly frightened by her sister's sudden advent, went out without a word. The order admitted of no retort.

Patsy seated herself on the edge of a chair, and, motioning Crawford to another, said icily:

"Won't you sit down?"

CHAPTER VIII.

The heavy rain of the night before and the blustering squalls of the early morning had been succeeded by brisk, bright weather. The force of the wind had been long in abating, but it had swept every vestige of cloud from the sky, giving full sway to the sun, which aided with its rays in drying the roads and fields. The Indian summer—that “last loveliest smile of the year”—had been unusually prolonged, so that the trees retained all their glory of autumn-tinted foliage, and the maple leaves, freshened by the wetting they had received, glowed in great crimson patches in the harmony of browns and greens. In the clearings of the woods and beside the highways masses of splendid goldenrod mingled with the purple and red of the fire flowers. It seemed as though the soul of the real, dead summer were hovering there, loath to leave the scene of its all too fleeting triumphs. Maple Grove, decidedly, was a favored nook of nature.

In the stable-yard the Duke was unsaddling Lady Belle, having brought that famous mare in from her afternoon exercise. The going had been good, for the sward was unseasonably springy and verdant. The air had been bracing, with those qualities that exhilarate like sparkling wines. Its influence moved him with a desire to sing, and he did so, breaking into snatches of "Black-eyed Susan" in a high and somewhat quivering, but not unpleasing, voice. And if the general effect was marred by sundry interjected admonitions of "Hi, there!" "Whoa, back!" and "Steady, ol' gal, keep yer bleedin' 'air on!" why, it was of no consequence. There was nobody nigh to hear him. At least, so the Duke supposed. Not that it would have made any difference—he would have gone on just the same, being in musical humor.

"William, 'oo 'igh upon the ye-ard
Rocked by the billers to and fro,
Soon as 'er well-known voice 'e 'eard,
'E sighed——"

The ditty was interrupted by the arrival of Crawford and Mallory, and a command from the latter to leave Lady Belle and hitch up the buggy. Mallory,

wanted to drive his partner to the station himself, but Crawford would not hear of it. There was no occasion for him to go to so much trouble, he said. Mallory did not need much persuasion to induce him to remain at home. He had little time enough to spend with Patsy. He was very grateful to Crawford, whose thoughtfulness had raised him still higher in his estimation, so when the Duke brought the buggy around he ordered the boy to go along with it. The two partners shook hands with great heartiness, and Mallory watched the departing New Yorker until a turn in the road masked him from sight.

He was more than pleased with the partner he had had the good fortune to interest in the stable. To be sure, the advantage to himself from the financial point of view was not great. For the time being he would, as he had told his fiancée, get little more than his keep as a result of the arrangement; but without the funds that had thus come to him at a time of dire need, he would not have been able to continue the business at all. Now he hoped, in the more or less near future, to be able to make enough to give up the training-stable and try his luck with a stock-farm, which it

seemed to him offered a better chance of success. His experience as a trainer on his own account had opened his eyes to the fact that a training-stable such as his was not, as in former days, a lucrative business to be handed down from father to son. He realized that horse-racing had become the plaything of rich men, who lavished unlimited wealth upon their sport, competed for the pick of race-horses in all countries, and trained them in private. It would be folly for him to seek to make a breach in the wall of capital which blocked his way, and upon which he could only hammer impotently with his fists. His only hope was that among the few yearlings he possessed there might be one or two which would enhance the little repute Lady Belle had brought to his stable, and enable him to dispose of them at fancy prices. In the meantime he congratulated himself upon having secured the support of such a fine fellow as Richard Crawford.

Crawford himself was well pleased with his own part of the bargain, which was a good deal more advantageous to him than it was to Mallory. He was by no means a millionaire, but he was well off, and it had been his great desire to ape the wealthier men of

his set by obtaining a proprietary interest in a racing-stable. It was an unexpected bit of luck that had enabled him to realize his ambition, and he was all the more gratified in that he had at the same time done a good stroke of business; for he was no fool, and the commercial instinct was sufficiently developed within him to lead him to order most of his affairs with an eye to the main chance.

"Are you the Shrimp?" he demanded of the Duke, who was driving, as they emerged onto the highway.

"No, sir, beggin' yer parding, sir, me naime's Perkins, William Perkins, but there's some as cawls me the Djuke," replied that personage.

"Oh, you're the Duke," was Crawford's comment; and thereafter he remained silent, wrapped in thought throughout the journey. Uppermost in his mind was his interview with Patsy. He did not like her, and with good reason. With her keen intuition and familiarity with individuals of his stamp she had read him through instantly, and sized him up as a bounder. Her conversation with him had been brief and to the point.

"See here," she had said curtly, pointing her finger at him. "My little sister's not for you to monkey with. She's too good, an' don't know enough for the likes o' you. Understand? You keep your mitts off, or you'll find yourself up against *me!*"

He would have passed the matter off with a facetious, bantering remark, but she had forestalled his reply, and intimated that there was nothing more to be said, by rising and leaving the room. He wondered whether she would tell Mallory about it. He did not care whether she did or not. If the subject ever came up again, he would dismiss it as absurd, as a joke, and, further, as a matter not to be reverted to. He did not purpose to be put to any annoyance. He would have pursued no "conquest" that was likely to involve him in trouble, such a game not being worth the candle. He resented Patsy's lecturing and contemptuous treatment of him as a piece of astounding impertinence. He had imagined this stableman's daughter as a frail stage *figurante*, who would be highly flattered by his association with her "steady," and his condescension to herself and her family. He had planned to continue his acquaintance with her in New York,

and thus keep in touch with her sister. He now set her down as being altogether too "fresh," and not worth his patronage.

But Nora's eyes, her mouth, the readiness with which she had lent herself to his kiss, haunted him. She was not at all like her sister. She had no head. She knew nothing. She had swallowed the bait of the bet with a most promising eagerness, and her anxiety for secrecy and the manner in which she had acted when her sister had interrupted them convinced him that she was to be "trusted." He felt sure that she would look him up at his office on the quiet at the first opportunity. If she was afraid to—for she, doubtless, had had a bad quarter of an hour with the irascible Patsy—he would easily find means of communicating with her. He would do so if only to get even with the woman who had "called him down." But he would do so more especially because he wanted her. He had started in well, he told himself, with a satisfied smirk. What with his racing-stable, and what with his prospective conquest of this notable débutante on the "primrose path," he saw his prestige in his set appreciating a thousand per cent. above par.

Arrived at the station, he threw a five-dollar bill to the Duke, and dismissed him. The Duke did not become aware of the denomination of the note, which he had believed to be of one dollar, until he was well on his way homeward. Then his soul leaped for very joy.

"Five dollars! My heye!" he exclaimed. "That's what Hi cawls a gent, a real gent. Blessin's on 'is 'ead."

The sudden possession of all this wealth set him to thinking what he could do with it, and instantly his mind was made up—he would settle Nora's bet. This generous impulse was a very natural one with the Duke. Nora was the object of his timid adoration, and if she turned up her pretty nose at it—for it has been truly said that love and a cough never can be hid—this did not prevent him from worshiping with all the sweet, foolish ardor of his years everything that breathed of her and recalled her. And, after all, was it foolish? Who would seriously thus characterize it save one who has so long passed the moon-calf period, at whatever stage of his life it occurred, and had his sensibilities so blunted by the grim verities that the ineffable impressions of it have become

entirely obliterated? His love had made smoother many rough places in an existence that was none too easy and cheerful. It had brought in a little while a great deal of the sunshine of happiness to a nature gentle enough to crave it, and had nurtured an unselfishness that already was implanted on a native generosity, and needed but the impulsion of such an influence as this to cause it to expand in all its beauty. And if it was to bring the smart of misery and the sting of non-appreciation in its train, well, these are but the price that fate exacts in some disagreeable form and in measure overflowing for all joys here below.

The Duke knew—or, at least, felt certain—that the Shrimp would carry out his threat, and demand his money of Nora's parents, and he dreaded for her the scene that would follow. When he reached the stables he found the Shrimp working in the yard with O'Brien, and his heart went into his mouth at the thought that perhaps he was too late, that his fellow helper might already have betrayed the girl to her father. When the opportunity presented itself he addressed the Shrimp.

"'Ave yer told 'im?" he demanded anxiously.

"Told him what?" asked the boy.

"Why, abaout Nora's bet."

"I have not," replied the Shrimp shortly.

The Duke was much relieved.

"It's a good job yer didn't," he said. "'Cause she arsked me to give yer this 'ere, an' to tell yer to mind to shut yer jaw in future."

He handed the bill to him.

The Shrimp looked at it, and nearly fell over with astonishment. He quickly recovered his usual composure.

"Here's for luck," he exclaimed, spitting on the paper and putting it in his pocket. "Wonder where'd she git it?"

"Hi dunno, an' it's none o' yer bizniss," declared the Duke.

"I believe she had it all de time," asseverated the Shrimp. "Them wimmin is that deceitful! I guess Nora wasn't behind de door when bunco-steerin' was given out. She oughter be in de gold-brick an' green-goods bizniss, she did."

"Ho, yus, pick on a gal what's done 'onest by yer," grumbled the Duke.

"She done honest 'cause why? 'Cause I raised a howl yer could hear from here to de Bow'ry, else she'd a bin givin' me molasses-talk an' fake promises fer a month of Sundays. She ain't the foist goil I've knowed wid a strangle-hold on her conscience."

"Hi don't see what yer wants to be 'ard on 'er for," insisted her champion. "Yer might get tied up over a bet yerself one o' these d'ys."

"Aw, shut up! Yer gives me de J. J.'s," grunted the Shrimp. "When I bets on de ponies I'm always ready to put up de bones ter make good, see? Else I puts a air-brake down hard on me woids, see?"

And he turned on his heels, and, fingering the bill in his pocket, walked away with the air of a man owning the earth, and having an option on the moon and stars.

When the boys went in to tea, Nora was not there to wait on them as usual, but the Duke returned with a light heart to finish up his work in the stable. He was happy in that satisfaction which the consciousness of having done an unusually virtuous action always

brings, which is the reward—oftentimes the only reward—of heavy sacrifice made gladly in a good cause. He was elated at the very idea that he had been able to render a service to his idol, and save her from the consequences of her own rashness, but it was a tender elation which caused a funny feeling at his heart, and led him to sing “Black-eyed Susan” again, very softly. The minor key of the air and the sentimental words seemed to accord with his mood.

“The bo’sun gyve the dereadful word,
The syls their swellin’ bosum spread,
No longer she must st’y on bo-ard,
They kissed, she sighed, ’e ’ung ’is ’ead.
’Er lessenin’ boat unwillin’ rows ter land,
A jew, she cried, an’ wyved ’er lily ’and.”

“Oh, don’t you sing nice! I never heard you before.”

The compliment came from Nora, who was standing at the door, a lighted lantern in her hand. It sent the blood rushing to the Duke’s head.

“D’yer like it, Miss Nora?” he said. “My dad used ter sing that in the old country. ’E *could* sing. ’E ’ad the finest voice in our mews, an’ ’e used ter ’old

the 'ammer at the free-an'-easies in the club-room at the 'Coach an' 'Orses'—that wus the pub at the corner."

"Hold the hammer?"

"Yus; 'e wus chairman."

The boy was very proud that she should know of the honor his parent had held.

"'E's dead," he explained, eager to impart further information. "Hi caime to America with mother two years ago to try an' find me oncle—that's 'er brother—'oo caime 'ere years an' years ago. She's in New York."

"Did you find him?" she inquired, with an air of interest.

"Now, we didn't. We ain't 'ad now luck since dad kicked the bucket," he replied. "Dad wus a good sort when 'e wasn't tin-'atted, but 'e' 'ad a weakness for 'oppin the twig round to the boozier, an' when 'e wus up the pole, even mother couldn't do nothin' with 'im. Mother she never touched nothin' stronger than fisherman's daughter."

Nora, to whom the cockney's slang was not very intelligible, and who, besides, was not interested,

changed the subject, and got right down to the business that had brought her.

"Duke," she said insinuatingly, "you're a good sort. You're not like that beastly Shrimp. Will you do me a favor?"

"Do you a fyvor! Why, Miss Nora—I'd—I'd—do anything in the wide world for yer," he assured her fervently.

"Well," she coaxed, "I want you to keep the Shrimp from telling mother about that bet, if you can. It won't be for long. I will have plenty of money soon. I'm going away to-morrow."

"Goin' away—to-morrow?" He gazed at her in blank dismay. "W—where to?" he stammered.

"To New York. I'm going to be an actress. I'm going on the stage with Patsy."

"On the styge!"

He repeated the words as if he did not comprehend them.

"But I shall be back in a little while," she went on, in the same coaxing tone, "and then I'll pay up. Will you keep the Shrimp quiet until then?"

"'E's already pyed," he said.

It was her turn to be astonished.

"What do you mean, already paid?" she asked.

"Yus. Mr. Crawford gyve me five dollars tip for drivin' 'im to the stytion, an' I gyve it to the Shrimp, an' told 'im it wus from you."

"Wasn't that nice of Mr. Crawford," she said.

A load was lifted from her mind. She had nothing further to fear, for she was sure of the Duke. Her manner underwent an entire change.

"Then I owe the money to you, instead of to the Shrimp. That'll be all right. You needn't be afraid. I'll pay you back."

"I'm not afraid, Miss Nora," said the Duke sadly. "But I'm sorry you're goin' to leave us—awful sorry. The plyce won't seem the syme."

"Well, *I'm* not sorry," she told him. "I'm going to be in the chorus at the theatre, and wear beautiful gowns. And I won't have to slave and wait on a lot of dirty stable-boys there."

CHAPTER IX.

Patricia was a girl whose brain worked quickly, and enabled her to take in situations and form decisions instantly. When she had surprised Nora and Crawford, she had immediately concluded that her sister would be safer under her own supervision, and that the sooner she took her with her the better. It was no light responsibility that she had undertaken. She realized this when she had a chance to think of the change in her own life the step would mean. But she was not of the stuff to shirk her duty as she saw it, whatever inconvenience or sacrifice it might entail.

It would have been easy enough to surround Nora with all necessary safeguards as far as Crawford was concerned by simply informing her parents and Mallory of what she had seen, and warning them against the New Yorker. Crawford never would have had another chance to get near her. (Not that she attached any serious importance to the former's action in kissing the girl. She regarded it merely as a chance

exhibition of the audacious, asinine gallantry characteristic of the ogling fraternity in presence of a pretty girl when not sharply rebuffed. She could not, of course, have dreamed that in the short time that had elapsed between his arrival and departure, and during the very brief intervals in which he had been able to converse with Nora alone, the foundations of future secret interviews had been laid.) But there were other things to consider.

In the first place, it would be highly injudicious at this critical stage of Mallory's affairs to risk jeopardizing his chances of success by causing, at the very outset, unpleasantness between him and the partner upon whose assistance he counted to get him out of the hole in which he found himself. She knew Dan and her father. Their rugged honesty would brook no liberties with the women folk of "their" family. Therefore, she would keep to herself the knowledge of what she had witnessed.

Secondly—and this weighed with her more than anything else—there was Nora's display of temper, with its divulcation of her intentions, and its disclosure of her independent tendencies. It had opened

Patsy's eyes to the fact that the girl was nearing an age when she would enfranchise herself from control and seek to win her own way in the world. For this spirit she could not find it in her heart to reproach her, although it had tumbled over like a house of cards the edifice of home-staying ease and felicity she had builded for her with her hopes. Had she not done the very same thing herself? But, as she had told her parents, she very much doubted Nora's ability to take care of herself in a world where no ordinary courage and strength of mind were needed, not only to succeed, but to keep from temptation. The salary which from the distance of their country home loomed large, was, in her profession, especially in New York, disconcertingly meagre. Plenty of girls there were, earnest workers like herself, bread-winners who dressed within their means honestly acquired; but others, with salaries no larger than her own, were able to wear expensive clothing, and live a life of luxury. Some, indeed, went to and from the theatre in elegant automobiles. It would have been easy for her to do likewise. That she had not done so was not from lack of opportunity, nay, even of urging, for not only was she

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endowed with considerable personal attractiveness, but possessed the advantage over many of her most-sought-after colleagues of a strong sense of humor, and a wit that was ready and scintillating. For Nora, with her beauty and air of innocence, to rival any of these lights of the half-world would be easy, and it was a question with Patsy whether the disdain she herself felt for them would not in the case of Nora, with her weaker mind, be overcome in course of time by the familiarity engendered by constant contact with them, and by the love of flattery, dress, and pleasure she divined the girl possessed.

Still, she had faith in her own power to keep her from harm by guidance and example, aided by the girl's natural goodness and the strictness of her upbringing. Moreover, she argued that, as Nora was determined to earn her living in some way, the stage certainly did offer better opportunities than the department-store or workroom. As she had observed to Mallory in talking it over with him:

"There ain't a girl as begun with me at the Casino who ain't ridin' around in her own tiara; but the mil-liners is still trimmin' hats."

To counterbalance the factor of responsibility, there was something that was very seductive to the girl who had battled her way alone for so long. With Nora she would be able to have a real home—a home, however modest, that would not be a comfortless hall bedroom in a boarding-house, and would contain their own furniture, everything their very own—a home where they could receive their parents and Dan when they came to town. Her imagination already pictured its pretty coziness. Already she felt the sweet happiness of the companionship of a being she loved, of having with her always some one to care for and watch over; some one who would care for her and lighten her exile from Dan and the old folks at home. That very night, when the household retired, she spoke of it in a long conference with her sister.

Nora had looked forward apprehensively to the inevitable interview with Patsy. She wondered what the latter would do in regard to the incident of the kiss. Would she tell their parents? And, if so, what would happen? She had a positive dread of "scenes," and of being lectured. She was immensely relieved when Patsy informed her that she would say nothing

about it, and why she had reached this decision. Nora passed the matter off lightly, and blamed it all on Crawford. "I didn't know that he was going to do it, and I couldn't prevent him," she declared. She treated it all as a joke, and laughed about it. She did not, however, mention the wager that was won in advance, nor the fact that he had handed her his card.

Patsy took advantage of the opportunity to give her some sound advice, and to enlighten her a little as to the dangers which thereafter would beset her, but she was too excitedly happy at the prospect of their future to dwell just then at too great length or too seriously upon these things, and the girls sat up far into the night discussing their plans.

Two days later found them in New York eager to start in and do. They had arrived just at the right time, for Patsy, who was well known, obtained an engagement to lead the chorus in a new production at one of the Broadway theatres, and, after putting Nora through her paces, which the novice found to be much harder work than she had had any idea of, procured for her a place in the same chorus. This was something Patsy had hoped, but hardly expected, to be able

to do. Decidedly, things were coming her way. Everything was turning out as she had wished. Her anxiety on the question of money having been relieved, as both were drawing salaries in a piece that bid very fair to have an extended run, she was able to take up, in a practical manner, the matter of getting together her long-coveted home. Nora was only mildly enthusiastic about taking a flat. She had associated her career on the stage with life in a hotel or comfortable boarding-house, where she would be waited on, and there would be no work to do. The prospect of having to keep house was not particularly attractive to her. She hated housework. But the modest place where they boarded fell very short, indeed, of her expectations of what was in store for her when she left Maple Grove, and the meals made her yearn for a taste of her mother's cooking—for something fit to eat, as she put it. Patsy's scheme certainly offered some advantages. Besides, she did not dare to voice her objections on the score of work. So she set about the task of flat-hunting with Patsy with some show of the eagerness that animated her sister.

The latter had never engaged in such a quest be-

fore, and the prices asked in houses where they would have liked to live appalled both of them. It was a long and disheartening process of disillusion they went through before they were in that chastened frame of mind that enabled them to see possibilities and good points in apartments within their means. Then they hit upon a "treasure" in a four-roomed flat on the West Side of the city, not too far removed from the theatre district. What mattered it that the house resembled in few things, except, perhaps, the smallness of its rooms, the dwelling structures they had had in mind? What mattered it that the rooms were not all light, and the stairway leading to them was dark? Their very presence imparted brightness to them, and the cheap furniture and carpets the indomitable Patsy procured on the instalment-plan, at thrice their actual selling-value, gave them a positively luxurious appearance in the eyes of the enraptured girls. And when the final touches had been added in the shape of the dainty knickknacks that start into mysterious being at the touch of woman's deft fingers, and the portraits of Dan and "pop" and "mom" smiled at them from their place of honor on the parlor mantelpiece, what

could be wanting to fill the girls' cup of proud happiness? Nothing but the actual presence and admiration of their far-distant loved ones.

"I wisht Dan could just see this!" exclaimed Patsy, stepping backward to the door of the parlor, in order to take in the effect of the ensemble. "Wouldn't it wobble his lamps!"

CHAPTER X.

There is no twilight in New York—no twilight as in the fatherlands of the masses of its hybrid population, where darkness dallies with lingering light, where, caressingly, “night binds with her hair the eyes of day.” The lustrous gloom of even deepens quickly. The teeming city, tired of toil, strenuous still in its rest and in its pleasure, springs resplendent with myriad dazzling gems to forestall the subdued glitter of the firmament.

The evening parure of New York is a splendid radiance of golden chrysolites, and white, liquid brilliants, with here and there the sanguine splash of a ruby, and here and there an emerald.

There is no place for that moon whose light from all time has been melody to lovers. The gentle regent of the heavens peeps shyly, abashed, from a girdle of pearl, and slants her refulgence athwart the responsive sombre, though light-rimmed, harbor, flecking with quivering silver “the million poutings of the brine”

along the fringe of the outermost shores. In the city, a thousand garish moons outshine her, and lovers seek the glare of the fire that Prometheus attempted to snatch from the chariot of the sun, to be punished for his presumption with torment unimaginable.

Below the gazer, looking out from the eminence of a high building on central Broadway, itself a beacon-shaft that rises sheer from the island's pulsing heart, a river of gold and argent sheen bends southward. It is the great, glowing artery of the pleasure-loving metropolis, about which swarm countless human moths, attracted from the homes of all the winds, to be dazzled, blissfully blinded for a space, or caught in the swell of the molten current, morally singed, physically scorched, hopelessly charred, perhaps, and drifted away to where the glow narrows and deadens into the ultimate blackness.

Between the banks of convergent luminosity glimmers a long procession of tiny lights. These flash hither and thither, circle, flutter, are eclipsed and reappear, like restless, fussy fireflies; and amid them, following unerringly the contours of the banks, majestic comets glide.

To right and left, running longitudinally through the maze, invisible or vaguely defined, where Manhattan's denizens hive, stretch other luminous veins, a-sparkle with pure diamonds, these, and mathematically alined. East, west, north, and south, crisscross-wise, the sable labyrinth is ribboned with gold and silver, spangled with precious squares of the Pectoral flung broadcast, haphazard, by an unseen power.

Southward glistens a great palace of jasper. Beyond it lurid patches of canary sapphire, rising tier on tier, zigzag uncertain, fantastic outlines, as of a city on a hill—a mysterious Bagdad, conjured from the "Arabian Nights" by gigantic genii of dread aspect at the bidding of the beholder, at the rubbing of a ring.

A pencil of light darts upward and downward, to and fro, probing with its puny ray the blue-black depth of the infinite void.

A trail of amber planets, surmounted by a meteor of blood-red garnets, shivers and undulates, as though shrinking from the kiss of the passing breeze.

A triple tiara of topazes stands out high and clear in space above a triangle of jacinth. Other topazes, in

ropes, form festoons, wreaths, and pillars, rippling cascades and worlds.

In the east two rows of magnificent, diminishing pearls arch the night, their clasps lost to view in the setting of jet; and, seeming to have dripped from their melting splendor, a few scattered jewels glimmer faintly beneath them.

To the west gondolas of peridots pass slowly along a vast bank of twinkling stars, man-made also, piled in heaps, piled in mountains, spreading out to the confines of the shadow.

And the stars of God blink down upon the magic scene, palely, unheeded, their everlasting glory dimmed.

In the enchantment of this fairylike unreality, in this most seductive appeal to the imagination and the senses offered by any of the earth's cities, in the very promptings of the world of make-believe in which she herself played a part, the reason for being of which is the purveying of delight, is it to be marveled at that a young girl such as Nora, a weakling, suddenly transplanted from the cloisteral monotony of a home far removed from even the unexciting whirl of

a country town, should be dazzled, hypnotized into a gradual disregard of warning and advice? Selfishness and curiosity were her chief traits, and with her selfishness was doubled a persistence in the pursuit of her desires which, from her cloak of ingenuousness and submissiveness, never would have been suspected. There was nothing consciously, or, at all events, intentionally, evil in these desires, but she was impatient of counsel, especially since she had tasted of the liberty of her new life. She could learn no lesson from the wisdom acquired by others through experience and suffering. It had to be forced upon her by consequences disagreeable to herself. Yet she was of those natures which, when their own actions have landed them in trouble, flounder, clutch at any and every straw, and call wildly for help, but are rarely grateful to those who may respond and extricate them.

She did not of herself seek Crawford, but when he secretly sought her, she saw no harm in continuing on good terms with him, notwithstanding Patsy's preaching. Patsy was old-maidish in her views, anyhow, she told herself. She liked Crawford, and he had proved his friendship for her by enabling her to

win not a little money on the races. She had a very strong penchant for gambling. It was an easy way to supplement her earnings—nearly all of which went for her own keep and to the folks at home—when she could get tips from a gentleman like Crawford, who knew all about horses and horse-racing, was in the position to get “sure things,” and was anxious to help her. He was so very nice, too. He treated her as an equal and a chum, and manifested his solicitude in many delicate ways. She almost wished that Patsy was not in New York, so that she could be more free to profit by his kindness, and to spend more on dress. He had given her pretty presents that she was obliged to hide, and had insisted upon taking her to lunch more than once. She liked to go to the luxurious dining-halls he escorted her to; also she liked the attention she never failed to attract among the people there.

But it was only very rarely that she was able to accept these invitations—only when she could escape the society of Patsy on the pretext of going shopping, or of taking a walk, when her sister was busy at home. Patsy liked to keep the flat in apple-pie order. Nora, whose zeal in the performance of the household duties

had soon lost its edge, was not averse to letting her do as much of the work as she wanted to, and as she herself could escape from doing.

CHAPTER XI.

Whatever may be the effect elsewhere of such orders as

SILENCE

and:

POSITIVELY

NO

SMOKING

printed in bold type and conspicuously displayed, they remain dead letters and objects of jest in the dressing-rooms of the chorus-ladies of that well-known temple of mirth and music, the Long Acre Theatre, on New York's great "white way," where Patsy and Nora were playing.

The particular dressing-room they shared in common with seven of their fellow singers and dancers

was a good-sized one under the roof. Around three sides of it, against the whitewashed walls, and between the windows, were long dressing-tables, in rear of which were mirrors. On the remaining wall, which was pierced by the door, were rows of hooks, for hanging hats and clothes. In the centre was a marble wash-stand, with six bowls in it. Chairs formed the only other articles of furniture. Stuck above the mirrors and hanging on the brackets of the electric lamps beside them were trophies of the footlights—cards and notes from Johnnies, some from gilded youths whose names were familiar in the society-columns of the newspapers; telegrams bearing the date of the opening night of the piece, and addressed to each other by the chorus girls, not to be behind the custom that on such occasions overwhelms the stars and other real performers with congratulatory missives from friends in the theatre and outside of it; college ribbons, ribbons that had adorned bouquets, and tassels that had served the same purpose. Save for these and the printed notices already mentioned, with another requesting the occupants kindly to turn out the lights when leaving the room, the walls were bare. As re-

corded on the programme, when they happened to be favored with a part that carried with it the signal honor of being designated in print, the roommates of the O'Brien girls, a comely assortment of blondes and brunettes, were Minnie Sultzer, Inez Blair, Evelyn La Rue, Rita Nichols, Lou Archer, Mai Delaney, and Sylvia Simpson, a "show girl."

Seated at her table one evening, Nora paid little attention to the other girls, who were changing from their street costumes into those in which they were soon to appear on the stage. She was thoughtful, and wore a worried look as she pored over a sporting daily. Patsy had not yet arrived.

Inez Blair was entertaining her companions with an account of an adventure with a stage-door "Johnnie," whose advances she had resented by threatening to call her brother and a policeman, when Mrs. Georgie Adams Coote, who presided over the wardrobe, entered the room. She was a corpulent, vivacious person, who some time in the distant past had been a chorus girl herself. She was never tired of asserting that she had once been slim, with a form to

rave about, though the girls refused to believe that she ever had weighed less than two hundred pounds.

"Say, Georgie, did you mend that waist?" asked Evelyn La Rue, from her toilet-table, interrupting the story of the "Johnnie's" discomfiture in order to ascertain.

"I certainly did, Miss La Rue," the woman assured her.

"Well, I hope it stays up. You must 'a' used a red-hot needle and burnt thread last time, for it fell right off my shoulder," Evelyn declared.

"Most of your clothes seems to get that habit, Miss La Rue," snapped Coote. "You oughter leave some-thin' to the 'magination. Rita, seen Miss Simpson to-night?"

"No," replied Rita. "She ain't here. She won't come before the second act. She's bein' bridesmaid to Maizie Jones."

Miss Jones had been a chorus girl for several seasons at the Long Acre. The announcement of her marriage was news to Mrs. Coote.

"For goodness' sake! That man ain't married Maizie!" she exclaimed.



"YOU OUGHTER LEAVE SOMETHIN' TO THE 'MAGINATION'."



"Looks that way," chimed in Mai Delaney.

"Ain't them saucer-eyed blondes wonders, though!" commented the wardrobe woman.

"No, it's mommer that's the wonder," corrected Lou Archer.

"That's right, Lou," assented Evelyn. "A mother can do anything for you in *this* business, from makin' you a star to a dushess."

Milly was curious to know whether Maizie's husband was wealthy.

"He's from Pittsburg," said Lou laconically, amid general laughter.

"No use cryin' over spilt milk, but I wisht we'd 'a' played Pittsburg when I was with 'Evangeline,'" sighed Mrs. Coote. "I uster make a real cute boy."

"You'd make a dozen now," was Evelyn's disparaging criticism.

Coote was touchy on the score of her lost figure. She resented any allusion to her excessive embonpoint.

"You chorus girls is too fresh," she retorted wrathfully. "I'd hand you a slam in the map if I wasn't a lady."

"Please don't," expostulated Milly plaintively.

"Everybody's fightin', Patsy an' Simpson scrap at every performance, an' now you two's beginnin'. My nerves is just gone all to the devil."

That there was no love lost between the show girl and the leader of the chorus was quite true. They were forever engaging in a wordy warfare which invariably ended in the routing of Miss Simpson, for she was no match for Patsy when it came to repartee, and she hated her accordingly. Miss Simpson was the type of *figurantes* who, although earning \$15 or \$20 a week, have their gowns made by the most expensive dressmakers and own automobiles. Patsy despised her utterly, and made no secret of the fact.

"Half-hour! Half-hour! Half-hour!" came the warning cry of the call-boy in the corridor outside.

"Patsy's late as well as Simpson," remarked Coote, sitting down to mend a tear in a dress. "Is she at the weddin', too?"

"Not on yer life," declared Inez. "She can't stand for Maizie's push."

Milly wondered what Simpson wore at the wedding, and hoped she would come straight to the theatre from the ceremony.

"She won't lose any chance to make a gallery-play to us," Inez assured her.

"Talk about marryin' easy Pittsburgers, she don't have to, she's got money enough to buy a prince," said Evelyn enviously.

"She's awfully aristocratic in her ideas," put in Mai.

"Her mother uster wash for the best families," observed Coote, without looking up from her work.

"I don't know about that," said Milly, "but Simpson *made* her money in Wall Street."

A boisterous outburst of hilarity greeted this information.

"Milly, when it comes to a stall, you're a tapioca," declared Lou pityingly.

"She did," insisted Milly, "an' she's goin' to give me a tip on stocks as soon as I make a lot of money on the ponies. Girls, don't you wish we knew who'd win to-morrow?"

"I wouldn't mind knowin' the name an' address of a horse that's goin' to win," admitted Inez. "Say, Nora," she added, "you don't happen to know of a hundred-to-one shot that's due to be uncorked to-morrow?"

"No, I wish I did," replied Nora.

"Say, you look all to the bad to-night, kinder worried. Can't you figure out the dope?"

"I'm all right—just tired, that's all."

"Well, brace up! What's the best bet for to-morrow?"

"'First race, Sis Lee, straight. Fourth race, Little Wally, to show; the Veiled Lady, straight,'" read Nora from the paper.

"I don't like none of *them* names," affirmed Mai.

Milly suggested that Veiled Lady was rather a cunning one. She was going to make further comment, but Inez headed her off by asking for the entry.

"Inez, what d'you mean by entry?" demanded the simple Milly.

"I've told you a million times," said Inez testily. "Go on, Nora."

"'Sis Lee, Sailor Boy, Miladi Love, King Leopold, Bensonhurst, Immortelle,'" read Nora.

"Immortelle! That's a dead 'un," laughed Lou. "What's the dope on the race?"

Nora went on reading:

"'The opening two-year-old scurry at half a mile

shows a well-set field of a fair class, with Sis Lee the probable winner, though scarcely the best horse in the race.' ”

“How can it win if it ain't the best horse?” inquired Milly.

“Somebody gag her,” said Lou savagely.

Nora continued:

“‘In March she was beaten a nose at New Orleans by Merrie Lassie.’ ”

“What did I tell you!” exclaimed Milly triumphantly. “You can all do as you like, but none of my money on Miss Sis Lee, d’you hear, Nora?”

“‘Sailor Boy,’ resumed Nora, ‘is as good as the day he beat Follow On. Mi——’ ”

“I uster make a real cute sailor-boy, in pale-blue tights, an’ a dark-blue blouse all trimmed with anchors,” piped up Coote. “I remember——”

“No, don’t! Forget ‘Evangeline’ a minute—as a favor,” urged Inez wearily.

Nora concluded:

“‘Miladi Love beat King Leopold last summer and raced as well as Bensonhurst. It is a hard thing to get anything of consequence in this division so early in the year.’ ”

"To hear him tell about it, there ain't a dog in the race," grumbled Lou.

"That's true," Nora agreed. "The more you read the less you know about it."

"For my part, I'm goin' to take Bensonhurst," announced Milly. "I was there once, and had a grand time. I wonder if it's a pretty horse?"

"Bensonhurst—to win?" queried Nora, taking a piece of paper to record the bet. Gradually she had come to act as betting-agent for the whole room, with the exception of Patsy, whom everybody, knowing the chorus leader's aversion to gambling, was careful to keep in ignorance.

"Why, of course, to win!" responded Milly, surprised. "You ask the silliest questions!"

Mai reached for the newspaper.

"I'm going to pick them out the old way," she said. "Where's the programme?"

"Well, I'll be blest! Programme! You're a weird bunch of sports!"

And, having delivered herself of this criticism, Lou wheeled around on her chair at her toilet-table and began to powder her face vigorously.

"Smarty!" returned Mai. "I picked mine this way yesterday, an' I was the only girl that won, wasn't I, Nora?"

Nora nodded affirmatively, and Mai, closing her eyes, dabbed her finger at hazard on the list of entries.

"Immortelle," read Nora.

"Oh, Mai, don't take that one, don't take a creepy horse," advised Milly.

"No," urged Lou. "He wouldn't run one, two, six in a goat-race."

Mai closed her eyes again, and this time her groping digit stopped at King Leopold.

Evelyn waxed greatly excited.

"Ain't that the Kink that likes chorus girls?" she demanded.

"Yes, me for the Kink," said Lou.

"Me, too," chorused Rita and Evelyn.

The girls all gathered about the table, greatly interested. Coote joined them.

"Ain't any one goin' to make a pool?" she wanted to know. "I'm a little short. I'll go in with some one. Nora, couldn't you trust me for seventy-five

cents? I'd like to split it three ways on Sailor Boy. I s'pose it's foolish to be superstitious, but it's a sure hunch. I uster be a real cute sailor-boy."

"We know, all trimmed with anchors," said Evelyn. "You may find some on Sailor Boy, at that."

There was a laugh at this sally, and it made Coote furious.

"That's right, sneer at a poor woman with a husband that ain't workin'," she shouted, amid renewed hilarity.

She bounced out of the room, but, returning, thrust her head in at the door and hurled at them in one hissing epithet all her concentrated rage and disgust:

"Pikers!"

"Nora, put me down for the usual. Sis Lee across the board," instructed Inez.

"What's 'across the board'?" interrogated Milly. "Say, Inez, what the meaning of 'across the board'?"

"Haven't time to tell you. The race is called for three to-morrow," came the answer.

"I think you're horrid," protested Milly, much hurt. "It ain't fair. I've just as much right to play across the board as any one."

"All right, Bensonhurst across the board," said Nora, jotting it down. "I'll collect the money after the show."

Lou had been reconnoitring at the door.

"Nix with the racin' news! Here comes Patsy," she warned.

The girls gathered around the table immediately scattered to their places, and Nora hastily put the paper away. But it was a false alarm. The new arrival was Sylvia Simpson. The show girl was a tall, handsome, haughty person, most elegantly attired. She walked with an affected stateliness that brought out all the chic of her costume. Simpson certainly knew how to wear clothes. Also, she dressed with taste.

"Oh, Simpson, did you have a good time?" demanded Mai eagerly, while all the other girls inspected the bridesmaid with a critical interest that they sought not to make too evident.

"Ciel! Weddings are such a bore," replied Simpson, turning a languid eye upon her.

"Oh, I think they're lovely," said Nora.

"They're getting frightfully common. Every chorus girl you know is getting married."

And Simpson moved to the middle of the room so that the girls should get the full effect of her habiliments.

"What a love of a coat," said Nora admiringly, clasping her hands.

"What did Maizie wear?" questioned Inez.

"The tightest princess I ever saw," vouchsafed Simpson.

"What else did she have on?" asked Evelyn, taking up the cross-examination; for Miss Simpson was not loquacious. It required questions to get information out of her.

"Not much of anything, except jewelry. In that respect she looked like a jeweler's show-case."

"Just like our prima donna."

"Yes, quite vulgar."

"Lots of people there?"

"Oh, crowds, but not a bit classy or smart."

"Many you knew?"

"No—but lots I expect to know. Loads of men introduced themselves to me."

She lit a cigarette, which she abstracted from a bejeweled case of gold. Then she volunteered her opinion of the bride.

"Maizie did a real mean thing," she said, "she tried to cut me out of my entrance."

"The idea!" exclaimed her hearers, and Lou remarked that crowding other women on was an old trick of the ex-chorus girl.

"I told her that if she thought I blowed in five hundred dollars for this dress just to be a bridesmaid she was good and well mistaken," went on Simpson, encouraged by their sympathy. "I was there to be looked at, and you bet I *was*."

"Did that cost you five hundred dollars?" asked Nora, with awe.

"It is rather a roast," admitted Simpson, "but it's a good investment. You've got to look well if you want any kind of a salary in this business."

Inez tittered audibly and the others smiled.

"Did you see anything humorous in that remark?" queried Simpson haughtily.

"No," denied Inez. "I was thinkin' of somethin' funny."

"Then if it's a good joke, put us all next, and if anybody has anything to say about me let them just speak right out. That's all."

Simpson swept majestically to a chair. There was no answer to the challenge, and the girls, one by one, dropped out of the room until Nora alone remained with her.

"Got anything good, Nora?" demanded the woman.

"Here's the entry," replied Nora, holding out the paper.

"Don't bother me with the entry. Hasn't that friend of yours tipped you off to anything?"

"No. What friend?"

"Mr. Crawford. I met him to-day."

Nora gazed at her with anxious surprise.

"You met Mr. Crawford?"

"Yes. Thought I'd surprise you. He's a friend of Mazie's husband. Soon as he found out I was in this company he asked right away if I knew you, and I said we were great friends. He's asked us out to supper some night."

"I couldn't go."

"Why not? You've been out to lunch with him. Say, he doesn't like Patsy a little bit, does he?"

Nora was non-committal.

"Patsy met him only once," she said.

"I guess once was enough for him, and I don't blame him."

Simpson puffed at her cigarette and grew confidential.

"Do you know, that man's a good thing if you work him right," she said.

Nora shrank from her with shocked modesty.

"Why, Miss Simpson! I wouldn't think of such a thing!" she exclaimed.

"You've been working him for tips, haven't you?" continued the woman. "I don't see much difference between tips and diamonds. Maybe he'd be just fool enough to marry you. His family have money. I think they'd *settle* if you *bluffed* good and hard."

"Please don't talk like that," pleaded Nora.

"Pshaw! Don't be silly!"

"S-sh!" warned Nora, placing her finger to her lips.
"Here comes Patsy!"

She went out.

This time it really was her sister. She could be heard in heated altercation with the stage-manager in the corridor.

"Don't tell me to get a move on; I'm not your slave," she was saying. "No, that *won't* be about all from me. You can take my two weeks' notice now. If you can get anybody to lead this chorus better'n me, get 'em, an' get 'em quick. Do I mean it? Sure I do. I don't take nothin' from nobody, see?"

"That's a good bluff," sneered Simpson, as Patsy flung into the room, followed by a number of the other girls.

"You ought to be wise to bluffs. You know a few," retorted Patsy.

"Don't you look grand!" remarked Milly, eyeing her in wonderment.

"Might 'a' just stepped out of a suit-case," added Evelyn.

"Come at me light, girls," remonstrated Patsy. "Say, are you pipin' me veil?" she went on, unpinning that useful and ornamental adjunct of her head-dress. "Ain't it a Susie Smitherino? I don't think this green's at all loud, do you?"

The girl's averred that they did not, and Inez remarked:

"I never seen you look sweller. Have you, Simpson?"

"O'Brien's a tremendously smart dresser," was the ironical rejoinder of that person, as she sat herself gracefully on a chair.

"Don't get petulant, sweetheart! You ain't the only Daily Hint from Paris," chided Patsy cheerily.

"Oh, Patsy, them's new furs," exclaimed Milly.

Simpson raised her eyebrows.

"Isn't it rather late for furs?" she wanted to know.

"Milly," explained Patsy, "I struck a clearin'-sale of furs to-day. Look at 'em—cravat an' cushion-muff, four ninety-six. Best Adirondack sable.

Simpson laughed aloud.

"Say, are you passin' me the giggle?" asked Patsy, pausing just long enough in the fascinating and absorbing operation of exhibiting the bargains to note her enemy's unseemly mirth. "Talkin' of sales," she resumed, "ain't that a peach coat, though? Two sixty-eight, silk lined. Feel that linin'."

"Try it on, Simpson, it might look good on you," invited Lou, fingering the lining to judge as to the quality of the silk.

"I can't wear ready-made clothing," she declared, turning up her nose.

"You can't wear ready-made clothing!" echoed Patsy. "Girls, ain't that a shame! Well, a perfect figure certainly saves money."

She unhooked her skirt and stood revealed in an underskirt of glaring tartan.

"Why, you got a new petticoat, too!" remarked Evelyn.

"Three forty-three," Patsy confided. "One of them invisible plaids. Maybe it wouldn't put Fift' Avenoo on the blink."

Mai's attention, however, had been attracted to Patsy's hat, and she stood off to admire it. The other purchases were passing from hand to hand, and her colleagues were inspecting them in detail, critically, and judging them mentally or audibly, after the manner of women for whom the new garment of another woman seems to possess an interest, the intense-

ness of which is not understandable of mere man. Mai's opinion was that the hat, like the rest, was "real sweet."

"It is a swell lid," agreed Patsy. "I blew myself there—two ninety-eight, imported model. They wanted to put a bunch of peacock feathers on the side, but I'm that superstitious! Besides, what's the use of trimmin' when I have a veil?"

She hung up her hat and skirt and took down a worn, flimsy affair of flannelette with wide sleeves. She turned it over and over before putting it on, and said severely, with a wink at the girls:

"Simpson, you've been wearin' my kimono!"

Simpson did not deign to reply.

"Girls," went on the lively chorus leader, who was in high spirits after her day's shopping, "I seen some waists to-day that was real beauts—all over lace, real lace. An' how much d'yer think? Three dollars. I had to pass 'em up, though. After I bought these yellow kicks me pocketbook looked like a disaster."

She held up one foot that they might see her new tan shoes *de près*.

"You certainly was good to yourself," observed Inez.

"I've been savin' on car fare an' lunches," explained Patsy. "I just said it was up to me to refurnish from cellar to dome."

At this juncture a very neat and very black maid entered and handed a number of letters to Simpson, whose servant she was.

"People writing for autographs," drawled Simpson. "Mon Dieu, what a bore! Here, Blanche, take my coat."

"How d'you like me Fritzi Scheffs?" continued Patsy, removing the hirsute adornments from her head and ignoring the show girl. "Take it from me, them puffs is goin' to be the dead swell article. An' such a bargain! When I tell you the price you'll pass away. Just flash your glims on them curls—feel 'em—real hair! I got the puffs, the bunch of curls, an' the bayrette for one seventy-five from a lady friend at the Casino. She's lettin' her hair go back to brown this season."

Inez suddenly recollected that she had brought up a letter for her. Patsy took it and flopped limply into her chair.

"Guys writin' for autygraphs," she drawled. "Mon Doo, what a bore!"

The girls screamed with laughter, and Simpson waxed exceeding wroth.

"Are you mimicking me, Miss O'Brien?" she demanded.

"Mimickin' you, Miss Simpson! Certainly not. You ain't got the French language copyrighted, have you? Maybe it's some newspaper guy wants me picture. I been in the Sunday papers twict this season. (She cast a glance out of the corner of her eye at Simpson.) I hates publicity, but anything to help the manager along."

"Do you know any real reporters?" asked Milly admiringly.

"I got a couple on me staff," declared Patsy, rubbing the side of her nose with her finger and taking another sidelong glance at Simpson.

Milly caught sight of the letter lying on the toilet-table. Her curiosity got the better of her discretion.

"Who's your letter from, Patsy? Is it your gentleman friend you told me about—you know, Dan?"

Patsy, her mind diverted by her bout with the show girl, had forgotten all about the letter.

"Sure," she replied, tearing it open. "He writes me every day, sometimes twict."

She gave a start, and her eye lighted up with glad excitement as she perused the note.

"He's got a surprise for me—somethin' swell, Milly," she said. "He's goin' to be out in front to-night. Fancy that! I must go an' tell Nora."

"Fifteen minutes! Fifteen minutes! Fifteen minutes!" shouted the call-boy outside.

"Gee! I must get to work," ejaculated Patsy, changing her mind. "Evelyn, gimme me dress, will you? Girls," she went on, as she slipped into a décolleté costume of white satin trimmed with beads of pearls and threads of silver, "who d'you think I seen to-day? Leslie Carter. She was buyin' spangles. I was close to her, an' rubbered to beat the band. Don't you just love Carter? Honest, I think that woman's got the most emotional hair in this business."

"I've seen her in everything she plays," said Evelyn.

"So have I. You know Carter's a whole lot on my style," affirmed Patsy. "I'm really cut out to be one of them emotional all over the place actresses."

"I know—an' wear spangled dresses an' smoke cigarettes," said Milly.

Evelyn intimated that she would not care what the rôle might be if she could only wear pale-blue tights.

"I'm just wasted in skirts," she declared.

Patsy dissented:

"Nix for the tights gag. Not that I couldn't wear 'em, Simpson," she said, as that lady sniggered. "I hate to talk about figures, but I could make the Venus de Milo look like May Irwin. I'm only in musical comedy to learn to be graceful. I bet I could get a backer to star me if I could get the play, but, gee! it's hard to get a good tragic play. Of course I could get one from Charlie Frohman, but I don't want to take it away from Maude Adams or Ethel Barrymore. I can always dance for my livin'."

"You're a hit with yourself, ain't you?" sneered Simpson, who never could see a joke unless it was accompanied by a diagram.

"Girls, I'm no knocker, an' you never hear me lead-in' no anvil chorus," retorted Patsy, "but if certain parties was where they belong they'd be makin' beds."

What Simpson may have intended to reply to this

was never heard, for there was a loud banging at the door with the stentorian intimation that the person making the noise was the laundryman.

"Hold on, I'm lookin' for that guy," exclaimed Patsy, going to the door, which she flung open.

"See here," she said sharply. "You got a fine nerve comin' to this place for washin'. You kept mine a whole week last time. I didn't have a stitch to me back."

"That so? Must have been a mistake, Miss O'Brien," said the man suavely, trying to placate her. "How many pieces did you have?"

"Let's see; there was four—a skirt, a shirt-waist, a—— Looka here, fresh Ike!" she broke off. "It's none of your business what I had!"

And she slammed the door indignantly, while Simpson tittered.

"Overture! Overture!" came the warning call.

There was a general exodus, and Simpson and Patsy remained alone. The latter was about to follow the others, when there was the sound of a scuffle outside, and Nora's voice was heard raised in entreaty.

"Oh, don't—stop, please stop!"

Before Patsy could reach the door Nora, greatly agitated, came into the room.

"What is it, honey lamb?" inquired Patsy.

"That old tenor tried to kiss me," panted the girl.

Patsy ran out and shouted after the man:

"Say, you beast! Yes, you! You leave my sister alone, d'you hear?"

As she reentered, still anathematizing the tenor, Simpson rose belligerently.

"You're speaking about a friend of mine," she said.

"Well," returned Patsy, "if you want to associate with him, that's your affair; but he can't get busy around my sister."

All Simpson's hatred of Patsy, the pent-up resentment that had been accumulating from day to day as Patsy's verbal rapier thrusts struck home and had reached the outbreak point through the pin-pricks and ridicule the chorus leader had subjected her to that evening, had broken loose. Simpson was on the war-path, and she was bent upon crushing and humbling her enemy by foul means, seeing that she could not do it by fair means.

"How dare you!" she hissed, white with rage.

"Oh, fade away, Simpson, fade quick," ordered Patsy, who, roused at the actions of the tenor, was in no humor to waste words upon her.

Simpson lunged for the only vulnerable point in the girl's armor.

"I suppose you're insinuating your sister's so much better than I am?" she said, with a wicked rictus.

"Well, I should hope so," replied the unsuspecting Patsy, with emphasis.

Nora's heart almost ceased to beat. She understood the turn the quarrel was taking, and as Simpson's eyes wandered from one sister to the other the terrified girl met her gaze with an imploring look.

"Your sister's so much better than I am—that's the best laff I've had this season!"

She laughed, but it was without mirth.

"Oh, Miss Simpson——" Nora began to plead.

But the woman was not to be deterred. Her poniard found the vulnerable spot, and the stab was deep.

"Don't Miss Simpson me," she almost screamed. "I'm sick of your giving yourself airs and pretending

to be so good and virtuous. You're a little sneak. Do you think I'm going to put up with your sister's impudence and me knowing what I do about you?"

Patsy went pale.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"What do I mean? Ask her about her friend Crawford!"

"Crawford!"

"Yes; your sweet little sister, who's too good to associate with me, is carrying on with Dick Crawford, going out to lunch with him, making dates after the show, playing his tips. We're all playing the tips he gives her."

"It's a lie!"

The words came hoarsely, raucously, as though she were choking.

"Ask any of the girls. Look at her—and then tell me it's a lie."

Patsy turned to Nora. The girl's face was buried in her hands, and she burst out sobbing.

"Say it's a lie! Nora, honey lamb, say it's a lie," entreated Patsy wildly.

Nora did not answer.

Simpson, her triumph complete, swept toward the door. As she went out she stopped for a moment to gloat over her stricken foe, and discharged this Parthian shot:

"You'd better look at home, Miss Patsy O'Brien, before you cast slurs on other people's characters."

When Simpson had gone Patsy remained for a moment speechless, gazing wildly at her sobbing sister. Then she went to her, pulled her hands from her face, and held her by the shoulders.

"Nora, look at me!" she commanded. "Have you—have you gone to the bad?"

The girl's sobs stopped instantly. She threw up her head and looked her sister in the eyes, while an angry flush suffused her pale cheeks.

"Why, Patsy!" she exclaimed.

There was an indignation, a fearlessness in the words that rendered doubt impossible.

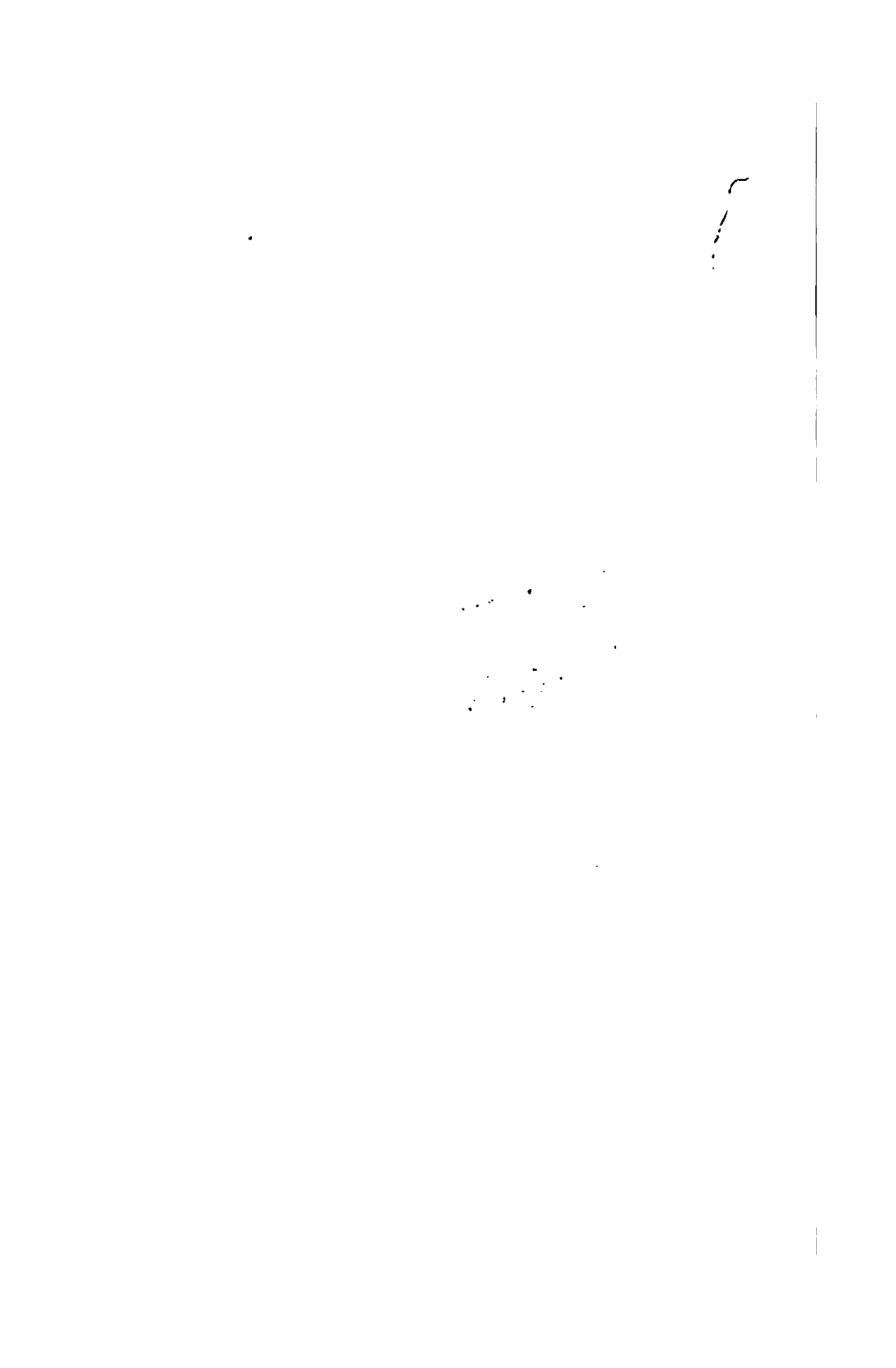
Patsy clasped her to her heart in an *élan* of frantic joy.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" she cried.

For a few minutes the sisters remained close clasped in each other's arms. Patsy was the first to recover



"NORA, LOOK AT ME! HAVE YOU—HAVE YOU GONE TO THE BAD?" *Page 152.*



her composure. Then, in her businesslike way, she started in to learn all about it.

"Now, tell me; what about this Crawford?" she questioned.

Nora told her that they had met—by chance—and he had spoken to her. She could not refuse to recognize him. Was he not Dan's partner? He had been very nice, and the next time they encountered each other on the street he had stopped again to chat with her. Now and then she met him that way—that was all. She didn't see any harm in it.

"But Simpson said he'd been blowin' you off to lunches. Is it true? Have you lunched with him?"

"Yes—once," admitted Nora reluctantly.

"Only once? Are you sure?"

"Well, may have been twice," she owned, becoming restive under the cross-examination. "He's very kind."

"Kind! The dog! Is it kind gettin' you talked about, compromisin' you, you little fool?"

"He's not a dog; he's a thorough gentleman," Nora protested, with some warmth.

"At least, you ain't made no dates with him after

the show. She lied when she said that, I know. You couldn't, 'cause you had to leave the theatre with me every night. But why didn't you pipe me off that you'd seen him?"

This time Nora broke out in open rebellion.

"I don't have to tell you *everything* I do. I'm not tied to your apron-strings," she answered defiantly.

A hard look came into Patsy's blue eyes. Her sister's attitude and disinclination to talk roused her suspicions. She determined to get at the truth at any cost.

"Nora," she said sharply. "Don't give me none of your lip, or you'll be sorry. You're keepin' somethin' back. Hand it out, an' hand it out quick. If you don't, I'll find it out, anyhow, and I'll put pop an' mom next to your goin's on. You know what that'll mean. You'll be yanked home so quick you'll think you got there by wireless."

Patsy's stronger nature, when she asserted it—and this was the first time she had done so since Nora's arrival in New York—dominated and cowed her sister. The latter knew that she was in grim earnest, that she meant every word she said, and would set about getting at the bottom of the matter with a ruth-

lessness that would take no one's feelings into account, and would override all obstacles. She became afraid.

"There ain't anything more to tell," she said, weakening.

"Don't lie!" warned Patsy. "What is there to them tips Simpson yawped about? Have you been playin' the races on his say-so? Out with it?"

"Ye-es," she faltered.

"Well?"

Nora was thoroughly cowed now. Through her gambling and the temptation to extravagance in dress made irresistible by the possession of money, she had got herself into a situation that appeared to her desperate, and had kept her awake of nights, worrying. While on the chapter of compulsory confessions and explanations she thought she might as well make a clean breast of it, and throw herself upon her sister's mercy. Patsy, under these circumstances, might help her. If she found it out from any other source it would be good-by to the stage and New York. She would have to face the wrath and reproaches of her parents, and housework and waiting on the stable-boys would again be her humiliating portion.

"He helped me to win money, and he helped me out of debt," she said, hanging her head.

"Debt!" echoed Patsy, astonished. "Who d'you owe money to, I'd like to know?"

"The girls."

"How, the girls? What d'you mean?"

"I placed their bets on the Montgomery Handicap. Mr. Crawford gave me the tips. They won, but—but I wanted some things to wear to go to lunch with him. I felt mean and shabby in those swell places. They were awful dear, especially the furs, and—and I didn't have enough left to pay all the bets."

"But what did you do with the clothes? I ain't seen you with no furs except the collarette an' muff I give you at Christmas, an' they wouldn't bust no bank."

"They're at Inez Blair's. I went to her place to change when I was to go out with him."

Patsy was more and more amazed at this confession of her sister's duplicity.

"Well, go on about the bets," she ordered, disguising her feelings with admirable stoicism.

"I tried to win back what I had spent. I plunged and lost it all."

"Did he give you the tip?"

"Yes."

"It was a trap."

"Oh, no. But I didn't know what to do. The girls were all asking for their money, and I couldn't pay them, I didn't have a cent. I just had to go to Mr. Crawford and ask him to help me out. I couldn't stand it any longer. He was very kind, he lent me the money. And now—I don't see how ever I'll be able to pay it back. I wish I was dead, I do."

She began to whimper.

"How much is it?" demanded Patsy.

"Three hundred dollars," sobbed Nora.

Patsy gazed at her aghast.

"Three hundred dollars!" she exclaimed. "Three hundred dollars! However could it be so much?"

"The girls each bet five dollars, and at ten to one it soon mounts up—oh, Patsy, how it mounted up!"

"Three hundred dollars! My God! What's Crawford to you that he'd give you so much money. Say—speak!"

"Why, nothing—he didn't *give* it to me, it was business. He lent it to me. I signed a paper. Mr. Crawford said to sign pop's name."

"And you did? You forged his name?" demanded Patsy, her voice trembling with her agitation.

"Forged it? No, I just signed—— Oh, my God!"

The realization that she had done something terrible dawned upon her. People were sent to prison for doing that very thing. She remembered hearing once of a case where a young man was convicted of having forged his father's name on a check. It had ruined his parent and brought the latter's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave. The son, a convict, driven insane by despair and remorse, had hanged himself to the bars of his cell window. Yet—it was clear to her now—he had done no more in forging the check than she had in signing the promise to pay.

"Patsy, help me, help me! What shall I do?" she moaned, wringing her hands.

"He has us in a trap," said Patsy. "He can make pop pay that money, an' pop ain't got no three hundred dollars, and couldn't get it. Oh, Nora, Nora, what have you done!"

For a moment she was crushed, and held her head, trying to think of a way of escape from the consequences of her sister's act.

"We must get that note back," she exclaimed, at length. "We've simply *got* to have it."

"Perhaps he'd give it me back," said Nora, with sudden hope. "He was very kind. He laughed about it at the time. I'll promise to pay him when I can. He's asked me many times to take supper at his apartments after the show. I'll go this very night. I'm sure he'll give it to me."

"Go to his rooms! Are you crazy? Ain't you got no gumption at all?" demanded Patsy, with angry impatience at her sister's absolute inability to see the wrong and the danger of such a step. "Do you think you can get that note without payin' for it, an' payin' dear? Don't you understand what he wants—*can't* you understand—after all I've told you? No, no. *I'll* get it from him. I'll go to his office to-morrow an' tell him a thing or two that'll make him sit up an' see straight."

"He won't give it to you," said Nora doubtfully. "He doesn't like you. If you make him angry he'll tell father and——"

"If he makes a move like that you'll tell pop first," said Patsy grimly.

"No, oh, no, we mustn't tell pop, he'd never forgive me."

To Nora there was no way out of the situation. All avenues of escape appeared to be barred to her. Exposure and disgrace menaced her. The whole universe seemed to be crumbling about her.

"Oh, why did you bring me here?" she wailed helplessly.

She sank into a chair, and, leaning her arm on the back of it, covered her face and burst into tears.

The reproach went to Patsy's heart like a heavy blow. She forgot that her sister had insisted upon coming, would listen to no remonstrances, and had accused her of being selfish and jealous when she had sought to dissuade her. She took all the blame to herself.

"Why did I bring you here?" she said remorsefully, going to the girl and placing her hand on her shoulder. "Because I felt it in me bones he'd come snoopin' around after I was gone. An' I brings you here right to him—makin' it easy an' convenient for

him to play his little game. How he must be givin' me the laff! He knew I was next. I swore to mom I'd look after you an' see no harm 'u'd come to you. If this gets home it seems to me I couldn't ever look her in the face again."

There was a knock at the door. Patsy found one of the employes of the theatre there.

"Miss O'Brien," he said, "Mr. Mallory ast me to tell you that your father an' mother was in front with him to-night, an' would you please hurry after the show."

"Pop and mom! I can't face them—I can't face them!" cried Nora, springing up in panic.

"Hush, hush!" said Patsy soothingly. "Brace up, honey lamb."

"I can't dance to-night—I can't—it's no use," she declared. "I'm sick."

"But you got to dance," insisted Patsy. "The curtain's goin' up. Stay here a minute. I'll get some-thin' from Coote to brace you."

She hurried out.

Nora gazed around her distractedly.

"I've got to go to him—I can't face pop and mom without that note," she moaned.

"Act's on! Act's on!" shouted the call-boy, running along the corridor.

Nora rushed out and stopped him.

"Boy—get me a cab—quick—quick!" she commanded.

CHAPTER XII.

Crawford was a man of taste and discrimination in some things, at least. His apartments showed this: they were furnished with quiet sumptuousness and an eye to comfort.

In the choice of his valet, too, he had been singularly felicitous. There was not a masculine friend or acquaintance who did not envy him his "man." Rogers had attained that period of life when one's age is put down as uncertain by persons who do not know it. He knew his duties and went about them in an unobtrusive manner. Having served Crawford for several years, he was thoroughly familiar with his likes and dislikes, and anticipated his wants. Almost obsequious in his deference, he was quick to comprehend situations, and Crawford knew he could count upon his discretion—in fact, the man seemed to have no interests aside from his. In a word, Rogers was of that type of retainer one reads of in books, and is led to believe was not uncommon in times past, but

which one seldom comes across nowadays, when servants rule the house despotically and the family is allowed to remain on suffrance, as boarders.

Crawford had just gone out when Nora called. By the time the cab had rolled from the theatre district and up the West Side of the city to the house in West End Avenue where Mallory's partner lived, her excitement had cooled considerably, and with it her courage had fizzled out. She had never been to Crawford's house before, although her curiosity had more than once almost induced her to accept his invitations, given pressingly. She felt that she was not doing right, and when the elevator-boy had let her off his car on the floor on which Crawford's apartments were situated, her first impulse was to run down-stairs again. Twice she extended her finger to press the button of the electric bell at the door and twice she drew back, afraid.

She was hatless and still in her theatrical costume—a gown like her sister's of satin elaborately trimmed with pearl beads and glittering silver threads, rather short, and deeply décolleté. Her little feet encased in satin slippers peeped from beneath a cloak she had

snatched from a hook and thrown around her—she did not know whose cloak it was and cared nothing that it was too long for her, or that it was strongly redolent of patchouli. Her face was still coated with the fards and powder without which the rosiest and most beautiful of complexions would look livid under the stage lights. She had had only one idea: see Crawford, get the note immediately, and hurry back to the theatre. It had all seemed very natural and easy at the moment her sudden resolution had been reached, but now that she was at Crawford's door it was different.

What would he think of her? She lamented helplessly that she had spent the money won for her companions and got herself into this predicament. Patsy's words buzzed in her ears:

"Go to his rooms! Are you crazy? Ain't you got no gumption at all?"

It occurred to her that it would be better to leave it to Patsy, after all. Patsy would get her out of trouble somehow. There was comfort in the thought, but immediately there rose in her mind an objection to this course. If her sister saw Crawford she would

of a certainty be very rude to him. This she did not want. She liked Crawford, liked him a good deal, and his marked predilection for her added to his many kindnesses had more than once caused her foolish heart to flutter at the thought that perhaps he loved her—perhaps one of these days would declare his love and ask her to marry him. She saw nothing improbable in this flattering dream. Many chorus girls had become the wives of rich men. If Patsy went to him for the note they might quarrel, he might refuse to give it to her—all sorts of things disagreeable to herself might happen.

No, it would be better if she were to ask for it herself. She was sure he would not refuse. He could not refuse. It was his fault. He had told her to sign her father's name—it was he who had made her a forger. A forger! The terror of it came full upon her again. How could she face her parents? They were in town—at the theatre—waiting to see her. They would fold her in their arms. They would be filled with their pride in her. How could she hide her wrong-doing, deceive them, be glad to see them

with the knowledge of her guilt gnawing at her conscience? No, no, she could not do it. It was impossible.

The elevator was speeding upward again. The passengers on it were talking and laughing. They might be coming to Mr. Crawford's. Mr. Crawford himself might be coming with friends. Thoroughly terrified now, she dashed for the stairs, descended to the first bend, and shrank into the corner behind the car as it shot past her. It did not stop at Crawford's landing. She leaped up-stairs again, and, desperate, pressed the button of the apartment bell. Her heart beat so violently as she heard the muffled "dring" and waited, that it almost suffocated her.

In a few moments the door opened and the staid Rogers appeared. Nora had expected that Crawford would respond to the bell, and she was taken aback.

"I—I'm afraid I—I've made a mistake. I was looking for Mr. Crawford's," she stammered.

"This is Mr. Crawford's," said Rogers suavely. "Won't you walk in, madam?"

He effaced himself, and, traversing a short entrance-hall, she found herself in Crawford's "den."

Rogers advanced an easy chair for her near a fire of imitation logs fed by gas, that blazed cheerfully in the fireplace, and she sat down.

"Mr. Crawford will be here in a few minutes, madam," he said respectfully. "He is at his club, but he told me to communicate with him if anybody called. Whom shall I tell him is waiting?"

Nora hesitated.

"Just tell him that a lady wishes to see him, and it's very important," she directed.

"Very well, madam," said Rogers, with a bow and an almost imperceptible smile.

He went out, closing the door behind him, and called up Crawford at the Athenæum Club from a telephone in the hall.

"Lady here wishes to see you, sir," he said, when Crawford responded.

"Yes? What is her name?" he inquired.

"She didn't give me any name—just told me to tell you that she wanted to speak with you, and that it was important."

"Important, eh? What does she look like: old, young?"

"Young and very pretty, sir. She's dressed for dinner or the opera, I think. Leastways, she hasn't any hat."

"That so? Well—ask her to be so kind as to wait one minute. I'll come up right away."

Rogers conveyed the message to Nora, put a newspaper and a book on a small table beside her, and withdrew.

Nora, left alone, began to look around her. There was an air of luxury about the place that was pleasing. The rug beneath her feet was thick and soft. With the red paper on the walls it recalled one of the fashionable hostelrys on Fifth Avenue where he had taken her to lunch. In the centre of the room was a square table of ebony, somewhat massive, with ornately carved legs. An elegant electric reading-lamp upon it connected with a chandelier above. Scattered around the lamp were novels, and a few of the latest magazines, mostly having to do with sport in some shape or form. On the smaller table beside which she was seated, a round one, was a delicately chased vase of silver, in which were some American beauty roses. Evidently they had been there for three or

four days, for they were drooping and faded. Heavy double curtains, red, also, were looped apart at the two windows, disclosing other long hanging curtains, of cream lace.

Between the windows was a lounge piled high with the softest of soft cushions, and above it, occupying all the wall space, was a picture representing "Youth," in which the life-size figure of a young girl beside a stream, in a listening attitude and wearing nothing but a mischievous, provoking smile, stood out in startling relief against a sombre background. Indeed, Crawford's taste in art seemed to run to the representation of the "female form divine," for other pictures in the room portrayed it in some pose or other. These pictures were few in number and far from being large, however, and nearly all of them were engravings. But had Nora been a connoisseur of such things she would have recognized that they were after well-known canvases by Fragonard, Rochegrosse, Barque, and other masters whose names were unknown to her. She was not, however, and she thought it very strange that a gentleman like Mr. Crawford should have such pictures in his rooms, especially such a picture as the

large one of "Youth." On a piano, and amid bibelots of bronze and ivory on the mantelpiece, were several portraits of women, mostly actresses, bearing autographs.

A handsome bookcase beside a door opposite the lounge extended from the door to the corner of the room at right angles to the mantelpiece. It was filled with books, bound and in paper covers, packed in wherever there was room for them, but in such wise that the titles were visible. She went over to it and read the titles of some of the more elaborately bound tomes, the gilding on which had attracted her attention. Among them she saw "The Decameron," "The Heptameron," "Aphrodite," "Laus Veneris," "Thais," "Contes Drolatiques," and Burton's "Arabian Nights"; but they conveyed no meaning to her: she had never heard of them. She was much impressed, however, and thought that Mr. Crawford must be a very learned gentleman to possess so many books.

From the bookcase her eyes wandered to the door. She wondered where it led to. Then she walked to the mantelpiece and looked at the portraits, framed and unframed. The originals of some she knew, at

least by sight and name. She took in her hand the portrait of one woman, unknown to her and very beautiful, which stood in a shining silver frame, obviously a new one. Something was written across it in a fine, delicate scrawl. She held it to the light and read:

"To Dickie from Tat. Memento of a good time never to be forgotten. A glimpse of heaven seen from hell."

She wondered what the last sentence could mean. The portrait impressed her disagreeably. She was vaguely jealous of this beautiful unknown, and she replaced the photograph rather impatiently and roughly. As she did so she caught sight, in the mirror, of her own face, all farded and rouged and powdered. She uttered a little cry of dismay. It seemed to her that she looked hideous. Mr. Crawford must never see her like that; she must wash her face somehow. But how? Where? There was nothing with which she could do it there, not even a glass of water. She wondered whether she could ask the valet to bring her one on the pretext that she was thirsty. She went to the door leading to the hall, but the man was not

to be seen, and she did not like to call him. Suppose she were to try the other door? She went to it, but hesitated. She was afraid to open it. Yet something had to be done, Mr. Crawford would arrive at any minute—he might at that very moment be on the elevator. She looked around in perplexity, not knowing what to do, and noticed the roses. Immediately a happy thought struck her. Here was water! Quickly she went to the vase, but stopped again nonplused. With what was she going to wipe her face? She had no handkerchief in her stage dress. With febrile haste she searched the cloak, hoping against hope that there might be one there. The cloak, though sleeveless, had a pocket, but there was nothing in it save a little book of face-powder paper. Her woman's wit came to her aid. She tore a large piece off her petticoat and, removing the roses, bathed and rubbed her face vigorously until not a vestige of the fards remained.

CHAPTER XIII.

On receipt of Rogers's telephone message Crawford left the club at once, and, hailing a motor-cab, instructed the chauffeur to drive him to the West End Avenue house as rapidly as possible. He wondered who his visitor could possibly be. Rogers had said that she was young and pretty, and that she was dressed for dinner or the opera. This puzzled him. That a woman both young and pretty should call upon him was not remarkable. He knew many who answered to this description. But that one should arrive hatless and in full evening dress was, to say the least, not usual. It was an Opera night, to be sure, but he had made no engagement to take anybody there.

When he reached home he let himself into his apartments noiselessly, hung up his hat and overcoat in the hall, and went into his "den" in his evening dress, and with a gardenia that he had picked up from the dinner-table ornamenting the lapel of his coat. Nora

had just concluded her impromptu toilet operation and thrust the wet rag into the pocket of the cloak. The hard rubbing had set her cheeks aglow, and her eyes were sparkling with excitement. She looked very pretty.

When he opened the door Crawford started with astonishment at seeing who his visitor was.

"Well, well! This is a pleasant surprise, Nora. You have said 'no' so often that I had long ago given up hope of seeing you here," he exclaimed, advancing toward her with both hands outheld. Unthinkingly she extended her own, and he saw that her arms were bare. Her action also parted the cloak sufficiently to reveal that she was in deep décolleté, and that her neck and bust were exceedingly shapely.

"How beautiful you look!" he added, with genuine enthusiasm.

Nora, in great confusion, hastily withdrew her hands and pulled the cloak about her.

"It was awfully good of you to come," he continued. "How ever did you manage to get away so early?"

"I didn't go on to-night. I—I wanted to see you," she replied.

"Not half so much as I wanted to see you, I am sure. Come, sit down and make yourself comfortable," he urged, reaching for a cushion on the sofa and placing it against the back of the easy chair in which she had sat before. "I want you to feel that you are at home whenever you do me the honor to pay me a visit. And now that you have come once, I hope you will come often. Let me take your cloak."

"Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Crawford," she refused. "I can't stay, really. I've got to get back to the theatre right away."

"Never mind about that—that'll be all right," he said reassuringly. "They won't make any trouble. I stand pretty well at the Long Acre, and I'll square it for you."

"It isn't the theatre, it's—— The fact is, I'm in great trouble," she explained.

"In great trouble? Dear me! What's the matter?"

"I must have that note to-night."

"What note?"

"The note I—I—signed—the note for three hun-

dred dollars. Father and mother are in front. I dare not see them unless I have it. As soon as I learned they were there I was so frightened, so upset, that I came away without stopping a minute, just as I was, to get it."

Crawford looked grave.

"Do they know about it?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, no," she answered. She was on the point of telling him that she had confessed everything to Patsy, but she thought better of it, and refrained.

His geniality returned immediately. He asked:

"Then if nobody knows anything about it, what is there to be afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of everything. I'm a forger! Why did you make me a forger? I didn't know. Oh, I'm horribly afraid."

"Whew!" he whistled. "A forger! That's a hard word. I wouldn't take such a tragic view of it if I were you."

She sank into the chair and covered her face with her hands. They were pretty hands, despite her apprenticeship at housework at home, and her arms were white and well molded. He noted every detail of

them with the critical appreciation of an expert, and marveled at their perfection of form. He saw, further, that tears were trickling between her fingers. The sight caused him real concern, and he was moved to pity and tenderness. He took one hand gently from her face, held it between his own hands, and pressed his lips to the tips of the fingers.

"Don't cry," he entreated. "Don't do that."

"To think I could do such a thing," she sobbed, "to think—— Oh, I have been very wicked and very foolish."

"No, no," he assured her soothingly. "It is nothing; you take the matter far too seriously."

He took the fingers one by one and kissed the tip of each. She offered no resistance. He drew her other hand down and kissed her eyes, wet with tears.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford!" she panted, suddenly struggling up and recoiling from him. "Don't, please don't!"

The cloak rose and fell with the heaving of her bosom. He followed her, his eyes glistening, but a knock at the door caused him to wheel about.

"What is it?" he demanded

"It's me, sir. May I come in?" replied Rogers's voice.

"Yes, come in. What is it?"

The valet entered and closed the door behind him.

"It's Mr. Mallory calling, sir," he informed him.

"Damn Mallory," growled Crawford. "Don't you know enough to send him to Jericho when I have a lady here? Tell him I'm not in. Tell him to call to-morrow—next week—next year."

"Yes, sir, beg pardon, sir. I knew, of course, that his visit wouldn't be welcome just now, but he telephoned earlier in the evening that he wanted to see you on very important business, and I told him you'd be here about this time. I'm sorry, sir, but I didn't think you'd be *engaged*. He's in the hall, sir, and heard you answer my knock."

Crawford was visibly annoyed.

Nora stood absolutely paralyzed with fear.

"What's he doing in town?" he asked her.

"He came up with mother and father," she explained.

He thought a moment.

"I wonder what he wants," he muttered. "Perhaps I had better see him, inasmuch as he knows I am here."

"But——" began Nora, turning even paler.

"That's all right," he said, going to the door beside the bookcase and opening it. "You wait in here. I'll get rid of him as soon as I can. Rogers, show him in."

The room was his bedroom. He almost pushed Nora in, closed the door, took some writing-material out of a drawer of the table, seated himself, and made a pretense of being very busy.

"Mr. Mallory," announced Rogers, ushering the visitor in.

Dan was attired in a check suit of sandy-colored material, of provincial cut and the ready-made variety, and held a soft black felt hat and a short tan overcoat, of the kind affected by racing-men.

"Hello, Mallory! What brings you to town?" inquired Crawford, extending his hand without rising.

"Surprised you, eh?" responded Dan, gripping his hand heartily. "Well, how are you?"

"Take Mr. Mallory's hat and coat," said Crawford to the valet.

The trainer waved Rogers off.

"No, can't stop but a minute," he explained. "I left O'Brien an' his wife at the theatre, an' told them I'd run over to see you, but promised to be back after the first act. Besides, I see you're busy."

"Awfully busy," lied Crawford. "I have a pile of mail to get off to-night."

Rogers withdrew.

"Gave you a surprise, eh?" repeated Mallory, twisting his hat in his hands.

"Rather! But won't you sit down?"

Dan took a seat and hung his hat on the back of the chair.

"Thought I'd run up to town an' talk over that McGovern matter with you," he explained. "The old folks had got to worryin' about the girls, so I brought 'em along. Mrs. O'B. got it into her head that somethin' was wrong."

"Had she heard anything?" asked Crawford uneasily.

"No; she had a dream, or somethin'. You know what mothers are. She wanted to see the kid badly, I guess. She's felt kinder lonesome since Nora went

away. Nora's the baby, you know, and the old folks ain't seen her since she left home."

"I imagine somebody else felt lonesome, too, and wasn't sorry for an excuse to run up to New York," said Crawford, while Dan grinned broadly. "I guess the girls are all right."

"Sure," assented the trainer. "Patsy's letters prove that. Seen 'em lately?"

"I've run into them a couple of times on the street, and, of course, I've seen them in the piece."

"Great show, ain't it? I came up for the openin'. Nora did mighty well for a new beginner, an' I tell you what, that girl's got the makin' of somethin' in her. But, say, isn't Patsy great? When she comes on in that second act leadin' that bunch of girls in that white dress with all them shiny flumidoodles an' that sassy hat perched on her little blond head, she's the hit of the show to me—ain't she?"

"Looks pretty nice," admitted Crawford.

"She oughter be playin' a part. Maybe it's just as well, though. She mightn't be so willin' to give it up. I ain't said anythin' before, Crawford, though I seen just now you'd guessed it; but if the stable

keeps on with this run of luck you'll be gettin' a weddin' invitation one of these days."

Crawford had been listening with an impatience that was not the less burning because it was concealed. In his heart he was cursing his visitor for a bore and a fool, and wishing he were sizzling in certain extramundane regions where from remotest antiquity the thermometer has never descended below the boiling-point. He seized upon Mallory's announcement as a pretext to rise and bring the interview to a speedy end.

"Congratulations, old man," he said, going over and wringing his hand with a show of the heartiest cordiality. "We must have a drink on that."

He took down a decanter and a couple of glasses from the top of the bookcase and poured out a stiff drink of whisky for each of them.

"To the future Mrs. Mallory," he said, raising his glass.

"To Patsy," echoed Mallory, with fervor, a beatific expression on his face.

"Here's hoping you're happy."

"Happy! It's a cinch."

"Now, how about this McGovern," said Crawford.

"Let's get down to business. I don't want to seem rude, or to hurry you, old man, but I have an awful lot to do to-night, and I know you are anxious to get away. Perhaps you would like to put it off till to-morrow? How about seeing me at my office and having a bit of lunch with me?"

But Mallory had other plans for the morrow. He had made up his mind to spend the day with Patsy, and he did not want business to interfere with the few hours of pleasure to which he had been looking forward all winter.

"Thanks," he replied. "I could hardly do that. I may have to start back to Maple Grove on an early train. But the business won't take long. I'll be through in a few minutes. I wanted to tell you that I guess I've landed McGovern."

"That's good!"

"Yes, it means a big thing for the stable. When the wise ones find out that old McGovern, the wisest one of them all, pays us a good stiff figure for Lady Belle, it will give the string a good boost, an' we ought to get fancy prices."

"What are you holding Lady Belle at?"

"Five thousand. I done a tall stunt of hagglin' with him. He was around to see me to-night before dinner. I told him to call you up. He'll run up a telephone-bill of five dollars tryin' to get you to take four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine. He's a gabby old guy, but don't let him wear you out. He'll pay the figure."

"I like your nerve, sickin' him at me!"

"Had to get rid of him somehow. I was hungry. He'd be talkin' yet. He's one of them chaps hard to head off once you get 'em goin'. You know."

"Yes, I know," said Crawford pointedly, wishing Mallory would take the hint and go.

Just then the telephone in the hall rang, and Rogers appeared.

"Telephone, sir," he announced to Crawford.

"I'll bet that's McGovern now," said Mallory, with a grin.

Crawford laughed resignedly, and went out, slamming the door. Mallory helped himself to a cigar from a box on the table, cut the end off, and looked in the mirror with a satisfied wink at himself as he lighted the weed. The door beside the bookcase had

opened noiselessly. It was being quickly shut as he gazed into the mirror, and he saw the reflection of a woman's beautiful bare arm. Dan turned, but the door was closed. A look of comprehension spread over his face.

"Gee—willikins—I see!" he muttered. "Guess I'm buttin' in on somethin'."

He closed one eye and screwed up the corresponding corner of his mouth with a comical, knowing grimace at himself in the glass. It lasted until the match, burning low, scorched his fingers and caused him to drop the charred wood, and his features to contort themselves into an expression of lively, passing pain.

"It's for you," announced Crawford, reentering the room.

"Now, see here. That ain't fair," protested Malory. "I've had more'n my share of McGovern."

"It isn't McGovern. It's some one at the Long Acre Theatre," he told him, holding the door.

Dan hurried out.

"The theatre—wonder what's up?" he muttered.

Crawford closed the door and ran over to the bedroom.

"Has he gone?" asked Nora, who was pale and trembling.

"Not yet, but he will leave in a minute," he whispered.

"He doesn't suspect I'm here?"

"Of course not. How could he?"

"I don't know; but I wish I were home."

"Now, now! Don't get rattled," he said, patting her cheek and closing the door.

Mallory came back laughing.

"It was O'Brien," he explained. "He says they can't find their girls on the stage, an' Mrs. O'Brien's in the lobby insistin' that some one's kidnapped her darlin's. Ain't that rich! They don't recognize 'em in their stage get-up. I bet the old man's got his hands full, an' I better get a move on. Where's my hat? I'll call you up in the mornin' before I leave. What's the quickest way down-town?"

"You had better take the subway at Eighty-sixth Street and get off at Times Square," advised Crawford, handing the hat to him.

"All right, thanks. Good night."

"Good night."

The men shook hands, and Crawford went to the front door to let his visitor out.

The elevator was just descending.

"Good night," called Crawford again in tones of great cordiality; but as he slammed the door after assuring himself that the trainer was well on his way to the street, he added, sotto voce:

"I hope you'll break your confounded neck as you go down the subway stairs, you lout."

CHAPTER XIV.

Left alone in Crawford's bedroom, Nora stood shaking with terror, afraid to move. Her first thought was that Patsy, when the latter found that she had left the theatre, must have suspected that she had carried out the idea of calling on Crawford and asking him for the note, and had sent Dan after her. She expected the bedroom door to open, and to find herself face to face with him. Mallory's cheery greeting to Crawford and the manner in which their conversation opened—for the trainer's loud voice was easily audible—soon reassured her. Evidently he was ignorant of her presence, and if he did not have occasion to come into that room would never know she was there. She did not suppose that Crawford would allow him to enter, but she looked around for a place in which to hide in case of emergency.

The room, a small one, was simply but comfortably furnished. Its contents were a large, massive brass bed; a large and handsome toilet dresser with a man's silver monogramed set upon it; one armchair and a

smaller one without arms; a pier-glass, and more pictures from which she quickly averted her gaze. In one corner, near the head of the bed, was a lavabo of marble with hot and cold water faucets, and near the door was a clothes-closet. She opened this. It was quite spacious, but contained much clothing and various articles pertaining to a gentleman's wardrobe. Despite her perturbation, she noticed that the bed linen and the lace-edged cover on the dresser were immaculate.

From the cupboard she tiptoed back to the door and tried to peer through the keyhole, but although there was no key, a cover on the outer side prevented this. She therefore held her ear to the thin panel and caught what she could of the conversation—she could not hear all that Crawford said, for he spoke in softer tones than Mallory. As the conversation progressed and she realized that there was no danger from Dan's presence, she recovered her equanimity little by little and listened with curious interest. Dan's eulogy of her even caused a smile of gratification.

She liked Crawford more than ever. How nice he had been to her—how gentle and courteous. She

had felt all along that Patsy had misjudged him. Patsy, anyhow, was suspicious of every man who was nice, and was always preaching instead of minding her own business. It was strange, though, that he should have made her sign her father's name to that note. She wondered whether he had not done so simply to humor her, because she had insisted upon having the debt regarded as a business matter. She inclined to the belief that he had, and that it was not, after all, such a serious thing as Patsy had tried to make out. Why should he, who had proved that he was her friend, seek to injure her? There was no doubt, however, that she had done wrong in signing her father's name, and it was imperative that she should procure the note and destroy it. She was sure Mr. Crawford would give it to her for the asking. He was so good. True, he had kissed her hands and her eyes, and she was far from being sure that this was the proper way for a gentleman to treat a young girl, but he had done it in such a kindly, fatherly way that she could not feel offended. Moreover, it proved one thing—that he liked her very, very much. She considered this quite natural, for was she not pretty—

much better-looking than most of the girls she knew? And she supposed that all real gentlemen who married girls began by making love in that manner. The kissing of hands, at all events, entered largely into courting as it was done in plays.

At last she heard the other door slam, and, looking into the glass to see that she was all right, and adjusting her hair with a few deft touches of her fingers, she opened the bedroom door to emerge. There almost within touch, but with his back turned to her, stood Mallory, lighting his cigar. Her heart stopped beating, and she nearly fainted. Her hand was still on the handle, however, and she had sufficient presence of mind to pull the door to swiftly. She thought that Dan had seen her, and she stood back with blanched face and dilated eyes, waiting for what would follow.

Nothing happened, however, and she soon satisfied herself that he had not noticed her imprudent sortie, but her nerves were so unstrung by the narrow escape and the emotions of the evening that she had but one desire—to get out and away from the place as quickly as possible.

When Crawford returned to his den, after escorting

Mallory to the door, he paused before rejoining Nora to consider what he should do. He had been making splendid progress when that marplot of a Mallory had interrupted him by his unwelcome visit. The girl's frame of mind had been such that he could, he believed, have worked upon her will with his tenderness until he had won her to his own. Experience told him that after the long wait and fright in the bedroom she would be less receptive to his persuasion, and that he would have to begin all over again.

He pressed a button beside the fireplace and Rogers appeared.

"I want a nice little supper for two, at once," said Crawford. "Fix it on this little table. It will be cozier than on the larger one."

"Very good, sir. What would you like, sir?" asked the valet.

"I don't know," mused Crawford. "What would you suggest—birds?"

"Hardly, sir. You've got to be educated up to birds. I should say a chicken salad, ice-cream, and a sweet champagne would be about the mark of this young lady, sir."

"Rogers, you know I couldn't stomach that truck in a thousand years."

"No, sir; certainly not, sir," acquiesced the man obediently.

"Bouchés à la reine—I know they have some ready—accessories, a bottle of that Château Margaux, and some champagne, usual kind," ordered Crawford.

Then he went to the bedroom door and opened it.

"Come on," he said. "It's all right."

He offered her his arm with a playful air, but she walked past him. He saw that she was shivering, and almost crying.

"I can't stay any longer, Mr. Crawford," she told him. "Please give me the note and let me go."

"Why," he said, "you are cold. Poor little girl! That fellow scared the life out of you. Sit here by the fire a minute. I'll give you something to warm you up."

"No, please let me go. I can't stay, really. I'm sick, and I want to go home. I'll come back some other night—on purpose to see you."

She looked at him appealingly.

"I wouldn't for a minute think of letting you go in such a condition," he insisted, arranging the cushion in the chair and drawing the latter close to the fire. "You can wait a few minutes, surely, until you have had time to pull yourself together."

"And will you give the note?" she asked anxiously.

"Why, that'll be all right," he assured her. "It isn't the note I care about, it's you."

She seated herself reluctantly, and he went to the sofa, gathered up an armful of cushions and piled them under her feet, so that they were on a level with the logs.

"There!" he exclaimed, with a boyish exuberance that caused her to smile in spite of herself.

Then he poured out some Scotch whisky, squirted a little seltzer in it, and held the beverage to her lips.

She demurred.

"No, I never touch liquor," she said.

"But you must," he coaxed gaily. "It's medicine. I'm the doctor, and you have to obey orders."

She drank a little, and he gave her the glass, which she held in her lap. The stuff did not taste unpleasant or too strong.

"There's no occasion for you to hurry," Crawford urged. "It isn't nine o'clock yet. You don't have to go back to the theatre—I told you I'd fix that. All your folks are there, and if you reach home by eleven, or even half-past, it will be early enough."

The whisky was warming her veins and steadying her nerves. She felt that it was doing her good.

"But what'll I tell Patsy?" she said. "She must have found out long ago that I had left the Long Acre, and she'll be wondering what's become of me. I'd rather go—much rather."

She took another sip at the glass.

"Never mind about Patsy," laughed Crawford. "She has to stay at the theatre; she's chorus leader, and can't leave till it's all over, because the chorus is on till final curtain fall. Then it will take her some time to dress and join the old people, and it will be nearer midnight than eleven by the time they reach your flat, even if Mallory takes them straight there. All you will have to do will be to put a handkerchief around your head, as if it were aching, and say you left because you felt ill. No one will ever be the wiser. And you won't be telling a fib, either, when

you say you were feeling badly. Just now you were really ill. But you are better now, aren't you?"

He took her hand and stroked and pressed it.

"Warm as a toast," he declared.

"Oh, yes, I feel much better," she admitted.

It was nice and comfortable there, and she felt inclined to yield to Crawford's persuasion. He had shown her how she could account for her absence from the theatre, and she had no particular desire to go back, now that she had missed the first act. Yet she still had some scruples. She was no longer uneasy about the note, feeling that it was as good as in her possession. But what plausible explanation of its recovery could she give to Patsy? She would have to let her know about it, or, on the very morrow, her sister would hie to Mr. Crawford's office and kick up no end of a rumpus there. She would tell her that she had written an appeal to Mr. Crawford, and sent it by messenger, and that he had given it up willingly, and at once. This might not prevent Patsy from hunting him up and giving him a piece of her mind, but she hoped to be able in some way to dissuade her from doing so. All this had passed through her brain as quickly as a flash.

"That's right. I'm so glad, because we are going to have a little supper together," he said.

"Supper? Oh, no," she declined, visions of the Fifth Avenue caravansary rising before her.

"Oh, yes," he affirmed, in the same tone.

"I couldn't. What would people think of me if I went like this?"

"But we're not going anywhere. We will stay right here, us two, by the fire."

"Not to-night; some other time."

"To-night—this very night. It's ordered, and will be here in a few minutes, so, you see, you simply *have* to stay."

"Well, if it's ordered—but do you think it's right?"

"Right? What is there wrong about it? What's the difference whether you lunch with me in a restaurant or have supper with me here?"

Nora felt there was a good deal of difference, but she said:

"I don't know."

"There isn't any," he declared, with an accent of conviction and finality.



"YES, YOU ARE—THE DEAREST, SWEETEST LITTLE INVALID IN THE WORLD."

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Rogers entered and spread a snowy cloth on the little table, which he placed in front of the fire. Then he brought in a tray laden with the repast, and the bottles of wine.

"Put the tray on yonder chair. I will do the serving," said his master, going to the windows and letting the double curtains fall.

The valet deposited his burden as directed, and vanished.

Crawford was brimming over with gaiety, and Nora began to enter into the spirit of it. The few sips of whisky were warming her blood and making her bold and at her ease. She wanted to help him set the table. He gently forced her back into the chair against the cushion, and the cloak slipped from her shoulders.

"You sit there, and don't you dare to move," he ordered, holding up a warning finger.

"But I'm not an invalid?" she protested laughingly.

"Yes, you are—the dearest, sweetest little invalid in the world," he said, bending and looking into her eyes; "and, as I have already told you, I'm your doctor—and I'm going to give you your medicine—there!"

He kissed her full on the mouth.

If it be true, as Lamartine says, that the most dead-ly coquetry is innocence, it is not less true, as Ovid of old pointed out—although the fact had been discovered ages before he was born—that the most chaste woman listens with pleasure to praise of herself. The kiss had taken Nora by surprise, and covered her with confusion, but his audacity had been mitigated by his flattering words.

“Why, what’s the matter?” he laughed, before she could formulate the shocked protest rising to her lips, as she gathered her cloak about her again. “It isn’t the first time I’ve kissed you. Do you remember?”

She joined in the hilarity the memory of it evoked.

“Wasn’t Patsy mad!” he said.

“She just was,” agreed Nora.

“I wonder what she’d say if she could see us now?”

Nora became serious, and did not answer. He switched off from the subject quickly.

“Listen to ‘the rat-ta-too o’ knives an’ forks, and the clinkety clink o’ glasses,’” he rattled on, adding, as he turned to her with a low bow: “*Mademoiselle est servie*—which is *parlez-voo* for saying that this feast of eminent reason has been spread, and waits

but the honor of being partaken of by she who is to preside over it."

"Oh, you mean supper's ready," said Nora.

"That's what," he answered. "But your majesty had better sit on this higher chair. You'll be more comfortable. And, here, give me your cloak."

"No. I'll keep it on, thank you," she said.

"And catch your death of cold when you go out—no sirree," he retorted playfully, taking hold of it and trying to unhook it.

She resisted, and retreated from him.

"Mr. Crawford," she declared, "I'm not going to take it off."

"But you must," he urged. "It isn't polite to dine with it on. Ladies never do such a thing."

"I don't care," she said decisively. "I'm not a lady, only a chorus girl, and I'm going to keep it on, and if you don't behave I'll go away this minute, and never come here any more."

He saw that it would not do to insist.

"The slave of the ring obeys," he drawled, crossing his hands on his breast with a comical look of resignation. "I'm a good boy, 'as meek as digestin' deacons be at ordination-dinners.'"

This made her laugh, and they sat down to the table.

"Isn't it jolly to be together like this? I wish you could come often," he said.

"It would be nice," she admitted.

He poured out the Margaux.

"I dote on these good red wines," he observed. "They are like rubies; they glow with concentrated heat and sunshine; they are a poem of warmth and love and beauty—the warmth and beauty of Southern climes, where they know how to love. See how entrancing its color is."

He held the glass up to the light.

"I can't say I'm stuck on red wine, it's too sour," avowed Nora, with her mouth full of the dainty pasty of a bouché à la reine. "I never tasted any till you took me to lunch, and I drank it then because I thought it was the thing to do at that swell place. I must say I prefer beer. We always have beer at home."

"Nora," he sighed, "you have a whole lot to learn, and I am going to teach you. Try some of this champagne—it's nearly the color of beer, anyhow."

"I certainly like it better," she said, after tasting it.

"Do you know I took a fancy to you the very first moment I saw you?" he went on.

"Yes?" she answered questioningly.

"It's true. You are a dear little girl, the sweetest I have ever known—and as pretty as a picture."

"Oh, Mr. Crawford, go on!" she remonstrated, but looking pleased.

"I mean it, by jiminy. You are too good for that crowd at the Long Acre."

"You have been very good to me," she said.

"Not as good as I should like to be, and will be, if you will let me."

He gazed at her meaningly, and very tenderly.

Nora blushed.

"Do you know, you remind me of a rose?" he continued. "I would like to cover you with roses."

"How can you say such things?"

"Did you ever hear of Heliogabalus?"

"I never did."

"No, I suppose not. He was a Roman emperor. He used to give grand banquets, and then smother the guests to death as they sat at the feast by causing a

rain of rose-leaves to fall on them until they were covered. Your white arms, decked with bracelets of large diamonds held by a thin thread, and projecting from a heap of rose-leaves, would look magnificent."

"Excuse *me!*" commented Nora, holding out her glass for more champagne. "Especially if they were faded roses, like those over there. Who gave them to you—Tat?"

He gazed at her open-mouthed, stupefied.

"Tat!" he repeated. "Where did you hear of Tat?"

"That's easy. She's up there on the chimneypiece, all surrounded by a brand-new wreath of silver."

A gleam of understanding and of victory came into his eyes. *Nora was jealous.*

"Don't you think she's very pretty?" he asked.

"'M. Not so much," she replied, pursing her lips.

"You don't seem to like her?"

"I don't like her or dislike her; I don't know anything about her," she declared, with an exaggerated assumption of indifference.

"She's my sister. I got that frame for her portrait yesterday, and, really, I thought I had put it in the other room."

"What does she mean by 'A glimpse of heaven seen from hell'?"

"Well, I'll tell you. She is married unhappily; her husband's a brute and treats her badly; and when she came here alone from St. Louis to visit our family, a few years ago, I gave her a good time, as she says."

Nora was unconvinced.

"It's a funny thing for a sister, or any woman, to say to a man," she said.

"Perhaps you prefer gardenias to roses?" he inquired, changing the subject. "I think there is something exquisite, something inebriating, something passion-inspiring in their perfume, don't you?"

He took the flower from his coat and handed it to her.

"I think it's beastly," she said, with a grimace, giving it back to him. "It smells like a dead rat in a stable. Did Tat give that to you, too?"

He laughed, and, moving over to her, placed his arm around her shoulders.

"Little girl," he said, "I believe you're jealous."

"The idea!" she answered, looking down. "Why should I be jealous?"

"You needn't be. And you do care for me a little bit, don't you?"

He took her hand and placed it against his cheek.

"Y-yes," she faltered.

With a cry of joy he lifted her, and, folding her in his arms, covered her face and mouth with greedy kisses.

"My Nora, my beautiful treasure. I love you—love you—love you! You are mine!" he murmured passionately.

Her head was swimming with the wine and the violence of his embrace, but she struggled to free herself.

"Don't, Mr. Crawford, don't!" she panted, pushing his face from her. "Let me go, or I will scream for help."

A succession of quick, persistent "drings" of the door-bell caused him to pause. They were followed by the sounds of an altercation.

"What the devil's that?" ejaculated Crawford.

"You can't see him, miss," they heard Rogers expostulate. "He isn't here."

"But I can and will see him, and if he isn't here, I'll wait till he comes, and you won't prevent me."

"Patsy! I am lost!" gasped Nora, in horror.

"Don't you dare push me. I'll raise the roof an' bring the police an' all the neighbors up," came Patsy's voice, in distinct, but not loud, tones.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" swore Crawford. "She'd do it. What brings that woman here? She mustn't see you. Get into the bedroom—quick."

Nora flew to the door that once before had saved her, and Crawford, picking up the table with the supper things upon it, carried it in after her. Then he threw in the napkins that had fallen on the floor, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XV.

When Patsy returned to the dressing-room at the theatre with a glass of stimulant for her sister and found that she was not there, she was very much astonished, and also much perturbed. They ought already to be in their places for the performance. She began a hurried search for her. That the girl might have left the building did not occur to her, for she had noticed that her street clothes were still hanging on their accustomed hook. She was unable to find her, however, nor had anybody of whom she made inquiry seen her. She ascertained by observation that she was not where she ought to have been, among the other girls in the wings. The stage-doorkeeper had not seen her go out, he said, which was perfectly true, for he neglected to mention that he had absented himself for a few minutes. Greatly mystified, she could reach but one conclusion—that she had got out of the theatre in some way and gone home. Nora had been terribly

agitated, and had said that she felt ill. She must have been in a bad state, indeed, not to have changed her clothing.

Milly Sultzer came running into the room.

"Come on, Patsy," she cried. "They're holding the curtain. You'll get into trouble."

But Patsy's mind was made up. She would go to Nora; the girl might need her help.

"Let 'em hold it!" she said. "My sister's gone away ill, an' I've got to look after her."

Swiftly she changed her clothes and made her way home. There was no light in the flat. Nora was not there, nor had she been there, apparently, for nothing had been disturbed. Patsy now was more than worried; she was alarmed. She returned in haste to the Long Acre, but nothing had been seen of Nora there. It flashed upon her that the girl in her desperation might have dashed off, just as she was, to seek Crawford, and demand the note, intending to return to the theatre as quickly as possible. This became a conviction, for at that moment the call-boy came along, and noticed her troubled mein.

"Lookin' fer yer sister, Miss O'Brien?" he queried.

"Yes," she said eagerly. "Have you seen her?"

"I seen her hike off in a cab just now," he replied. "She ast me to get it fer her. She wuz in a turrble hurry, an' drefful white about the gills."

"Where'd she tell the man to drive to?" she inquired.

"I dunno. I didn't hear that," said the boy.

Patsy waited for no more. Her first thought was to try and find Dan in the audience. He knew Crawford's address, and she did not. But she reasoned that if she went to her sweetheart she would have to tell him the whole circumstances. And, besides, he was with her parents. She decided that she had better leave him out of it. Dragging him in might only make matters worse. Yet how was she to find out where Crawford lived? It occurred to her that his name might be in the city or telephone directory. She could have consulted the telephone-book at the office of the theatre, but, concluding that it would be advisable to avoid the office, she went to a neighboring drug-store. The book gave the address, sure enough. In another minute she was on a car bound up-town.

It was simply incomprehensible to her that Nora could have gone to Crawford's or anywhere else in her stage-costume, for she had not even slipped on her jacket; but the girl had been so badly scared by the realization that she had committed a forgery, that it was likely she had lost the little sense she possessed. Anything was possible after what Nora had confessed, and, anyhow, she was following up the only clue she had. She was appalled at her sister's deceit and cunning, and at the situation disclosed by Simpson's coup. Crawford, it was clear, had obtained an ascendancy over her that had lured her very near to the brink of the abyss. She went cold at the thought of the peril to her sister, a peril which, with unceasing vigilance, she had tried to guard her against, into which the girl had thrust herself under her very nose. If she was with Crawford now, alone with him at last in his rooms, the worst might happen, for he who already had enmeshed her in the toils would have her in his power, and Nora was no more capable of taking care of herself than was a baby. By the time she reached Crawford's abode she was in an almost desperate frame of mind herself.

Crawford had hardly closed the bedroom door on Nora when Patsy burst into the den, followed by Rogers, still remonstrating.

"I knew you was in. I felt sure of it," said Patsy, by way of greeting. "Where's my sister?"

"Your sister?" he repeated.

"Yes, Nora. Is she here—has she been here?"

"I've just come in. My man might know," he answered frigidly. "Rogers, has a young lady called within the last five minutes?"

"No, sir," replied the valet.

"That will do, Rogers."

"That's funny," said Patsy, half-apologetically. "She ain't at the show-shop. I thought sure she must 'a' come here."

"Did Miss Nora say she was coming here?" he inquired.

"No," she admitted.

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned away with an air that implied that there was nothing else to be said.

Patsy was visibly disconcerted, but she was resolved to have it out with him about the note and his clan-

destine meetings with Nora, even though the latter was not there. She therefore stood her ground.

"Perhaps she went home," he suggested drily.

"She did not," said Patsy. "An' I wouldn't be surprised if she's on her way here."

"You wouldn't? Well, I would be."

"Why? You've been tryin' to make dates with her after the theatre, an' invitin' her out to supper, ain't you? An' you've had her out to lunch."

Crawford wondered where she could have learned about it. He did not at all like the way things were turning.

"I've invited her to supper several times," he admitted carelessly, "but she never would accept."

"Well, maybe she'll be here to-night, a little later," said Patsy, who was recovering her habitual sangfroid.

"I haven't received any word that she'll be here later," he remarked, with a bored air.

"I've a presentment—don't you call it?—she will," continued Patsy. "I got to see her important. You don't mind if I wait a few minutes?"

"Oh, certainly not," he said, with plain annoyance,

thrusting his hands in his pockets and looking at her in a way that indicated that he did mind, and would much prefer her room to her company.

"You ain't awful affable, are you?" observed his imperturbable visitor. "I could use a chair if it was handed me."

"I beg your pardon, Miss O'Brien."

With a very bad grace he advanced a chair for her, but remained standing himself.

Patsy settled herself in the seat, and began to make preparations for a stay by removing her hat.

"Gee, I'm tired," she said. "I done a hard chase here. Ain't it awful the way these hat-pins can crimp you? Would I be takin' a liberty if I asked for a drink?"

"Certainly not," he said sulkily. "What will it be, a glass of champagne?"

He went toward a pail of cracked ice in which the champagne of the interrupted supper was standing, and which he had not had time to remove with the other things.

"Nix with the wealthy water," she refused.

"A glass of beer?"

"No suds in mine, thanks, just plain Croton."

He gave her some water out of the seltzer-siphon, and she proceeded to refresh herself, gazing with interest around the room as she did so. Crawford remained standing and tapping the carpet slowly with the toe of his right shoe.

"This place is awful cute and cozy," she commented. "You must enjoy life to beat the band—nothin' on your mind but your hair."

He vouchsafed no reply.

"How many rooms you got?" she asked.

"Oh, two or three," he answered.

"Where does that door lead to?"

"That's a sort of closet for my man."

There was silence for a few minutes. Patsy's curiosity seemed to have been fully gratified, but she manifested no disposition to go. As a matter of fact, however, the girl was satisfied in her mind that Nora had not been there, and would not come. She was worrying seriously, and had resolved to take Crawford to task about the note and his running after Nora, make him give up the bit of paper, and leave as quickly as possible, in order to continue her search.

She could not imagine where she had gone in the cab, and she feared that in her fright and shame the girl might have committed some rash act—might have been driven to contemplate self-destruction. Crawford thought that he might, perhaps, accelerate his caller's departure by turning the conversation to herself.

"Aren't you dancing to-night?" he demanded.

"No, I got the pip in me ankle. Got too gay at rehearsal yesterday," she said.

"Dancing must be very hard work. It looks so acrobatic," he ventured.

"The smile's the hard part," she explained. "It's no cinch standin' on one toe, with the other pointin' to quarter to six, an' then look like the cat that's just eat the canary. I've often wished I'd gone into Wall Street. I got a great head for bizness. Now, Nora's just the opposite. Wonder where she is? Oh, well, it's no use worryin'. I'm enjoyin' meself."

There was another interval of silence. This time it was broken by Patsy.

"Gee! it's hot in here," she exclaimed. "Say, what was we talkin' about?"

"Yourself, I think," he said, balancing himself on his heels and toes, and indicating by his attitude that he wished she would leave.

"Let's talk about Nora," she went on.

"What about Nora?"

"I want you to let my sister alone. She's new to the game, an' she's a good kid."

"I guess she's able to take care of herself—and when a girl's good——"

"She's good anywhere. Yes, I know all about that. An' that other one about the wages of sin bein' death. Well, maybe—but, say, when you're scrimpin' along on twenty per, an' the next girl to you in the dressin'-room comes down to the show-shop every night in a benzine buzz-wagon—in ermine capes an' diamonds big as oysters—it ain't religion so much as a firm grip on home and mother that keeps you handin' out the icy eye to the man behind the bank-roll. You see, Nora's a awful ninny. Why, she even thinks that note of hers you got is good. Honest, when she told me I nearly laffed meself to death!"

Crawford's bored look vanished, and he reddened to his hair.

"She told you about that note?" he questioned.

"None other," said Patsy.

Crawford underwent a complete revulsion of feeling in regard to Nora. Like other men of his kind afflicted with moral strabismus, who prey upon the inexperience and credulity of girls they seek to ensnare, he was easily suspicious, and very sensitive about being duped by women himself, of being "had for a sucker," as he would have expressed it. Nora had assured him that no one knew anything of this note, yet she had told at least one person about it—her sister, in whom for once he had met his match, and detested in consequence, who at their very first meeting had handled him without gloves, and humbled him unceremoniously. Patsy knew also that he had been making appointments with her, and taking her to lunch and urging her to come to his rooms. He began to suspect that Nora's air of guilelessness was assumed; that she was by no means so ingenuous as she seemed; that she had been "working" him for money as well as for tips on the races, and laughing at him behind his back with the other girls of the chorus who profited by his generosity in giving in-

formation and placing bets, and that having gone too far and put herself, in a measure, under his thumb was "squealing" and bringing her relatives to her aid. The thought was something more than galling. The best thing he could have done would have been to treat the note as a jocular matter, inasmuch as he knew that it could not be collected. But he had counted on the debt and the note to square things with Patsy in the event of trouble arising at any time over Nora. Moreover, he was unwilling to cede any ground to his too knowing visitor, and sought to carry it off with a high hand.

"The note's good, all right," he bluffed.

"Quit yer kiddin'," she said quietly.

"It's good for three hundred dollars," he insisted.

Patsy eyed him pityingly.

"Get a transfer, Crawford, get a transfer," she said.

"It's only a forgery, an' a bum one at that."

"I don't believe Mr. P. O'Brien would put it to protest if I presented it at my bank for payment, all the same," he declared, angry through and through, but doing his best not to show it.

Patsy had been meeting bluff with bluff. In point of fact, she did not know enough about such things to be able to tell whether the note was worthless or not. That he would present it for payment through his bank was a contingency she had not reckoned with, because she was not aware that notes could be used that way. All sorts of vague, alarming consequences of such a course presented themselves to her. She shifted her ground at once.

"But you're not goin' to do that," she said persuasively.

"That depends," he parried.

"You wouldn't show Nora up to her father; you're too good a sport for that."

"I'm a good sport, all right, but I'm not a mark," he said emphatically. "That money is due me honestly, and I purpose getting the value of it."

"Honestly! Is it?" she retorted. "Now, on the level, you don't call leadin' a girl of seventeen into makin' a fool of herself an' puttin' her father's name to paper honest? If you ask me, it's a bunk."

"But I'm not asking you. If you please, we'll not discuss it."

He said this coldly and firmly, as if that ended it. Patsy, however, was not to be intimidated.

"Sure we'll discuss it, and settle it now," she said, rising and facing him. "It'll save me a trip to your office to-morrow."

"This concerns your sister and me alone," he told her.

"You mean it's none of my business?"

"Precisely."

"Then I'm goin' to make it my business. This note with the phoney signature brings pop an' the family into the muss."

"The matter is entirely between your sister and me. We are competent to manage our own affairs, and we will."

"You can manage yours, all right, but I'll have a hand in managin' my sister's, or know the reason why. I've promised my mother to take care of her, an' you bet your life I'm goin' to."

"And I am going to protect my interests."

"Well, let me tell you you're not goin' about it right. Your interest in Dan Mallory's stable's a pretty good thing, ain't it?"

"What has that to do with it?"

Patsy looked at him grimly.

"What has it got to do with it?" she said. "You get gay with that phoney note an' I'll show you up. Dan wouldn't do a *thing* to you!"

Crawford laughed at her.

"Do you think you can frighten me with your threats?" he sneered. "I'm not afraid of Mallory, or of any other man. Besides, he wouldn't be such a fool as to jeopardize the future of his stables."

"He wouldn't, eh?" replied Patsy quickly. "A lot you know about it. Why, he'd dump you an' that stable so quick on my say-so it 'u'd make your head swim. Dan's all to the good, he is. It's the right steer I'm givin' you, Crawford, an' if you've got a lick of sense, you'll pass over that note an' let me go home. I'm tired."

She took up her hat and put it on.

"If you've stayed here all this time, it isn't because *I've* detained you," he said sarcastically. "As for the note——"

The door opened simultaneously with a knock upon it, and Rogers came in, much flustered.

"Mrs. O'Brien's in the hall, sir," he announced.

"Mom!" exclaimed Patsy, in great alarm.

She and Crawford looked at each other.

"I can't receive her," said Crawford.

"She says she won't leave without seeing you, sir."

"It won't do for her to find me here," whispered Patsy. "She wouldn't understand, an' I couldn't explain without givin' Nora away. What'll I do? Where'll I go?"

Crawford was at a loss what to do himself. The complication was beyond him.

"You people are getting on my nerves," he growled.

"Here, step behind the curtains."

But Patsy had darted for the bedroom door, which she had been told was that of a closet.

"No, no, not there!" cried Crawford, rushing forward to stop her.

It was too late. She had gone in.

Cursing deeply under his breath, Crawford turned to meet the old woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

Down at Maple Grove the winter had been a long one to everybody. After Nora had left the life seemed to have gone out of the homestead. At first it had not been so bad. The excitement incident to the departure of the girls, and endless discussion as to what they would do and how Nora would get on, kept Mallory and the old people keyed up. That they would be all right was never the subject of doubt for one moment. All had unbounded confidence in Patsy, the breadwinner, and in her ability to shift for Nora as well as for herself. That their faith was fully justified was proved when, two weeks after the arrival of the girls in New York, a letter was received announcing Patsy's engagement at the Long Acre Theatre, and when, subsequently, came the news that she had procured an engagement for Nora in the same company. This caused great rejoicing. It was particularly gratifying because for some time, at least, there would be no touring with the production, and the girls would

remain in New York. The hopes of the little family ran high.

On top of this was Patsy's momentous enterprise in taking a flat, and her glowing descriptions of the luxury and comfort they enjoyed in it. The letters of both girls gave such minute particulars that the old people were able to picture the place in the mind's eye—though the picture, as such pictures always do, differed largely from the original.

Nora's departure, however, was a tearing away which was bound to be felt, and felt severely. As the "baby," she had held a very large part indeed in the hearts and lives of her parents, especially after Patsy had flown the home nest. After a time the loss of her bright presence and talkativeness began to have its effect on Mrs. O'Brien. She became irritable; then melancholy.

"Sure the house is loike a stove in winter with the foire out since me baby's gone away," she complained.

O'Brien missed the girl just as badly, but if he went about his duties with unwonted quietness and an air of abstraction, he was careful not to let his feelings betray him in the house. There he maintained his ac-

customed cheerfulness and good humor, and did his utmost to keep his wife's spirits up. As to Dan, he understood the state of mind of both of them, and in his unobtrusive, unselfish way sought to help them to become reconciled to the changed conditions.

Another person by whom Nora's absence was keenly felt was the Duke, and her departure had further consequences for him in troubles of various kinds, and another fierce encounter with the Shrimp. The Duke's liveliness had been succeeded by a gloominess that was positively melodramatic, and alternated with periods of sickly sentimentality. His moroseness was so marked, especially as it was accompanied by diminished appetite, that Mrs. O'Brien noticed it, and her motherly solicitude was aroused. She rather liked the Duke.

"'Tis bilious ye are, choild," she said one morning after watching him attentively. "Yir liver's all upset. Oi'll have to physic ye. Show me yir tongue."

The Duke shook his head.

"You myke a mistyke, mum," he replied. "It ain't because I don't feel like blowin' aout me kite that I wants physic."

"Thin phwat's the matter?" she demanded.

"Nothin', habsolutely nothin'. Hi'm all right," he assured her.

"But ye're not all right," she said authoritatively, "an' ye can't fool me by sayin' that yez are. If it's not yir liver, phwat is it?"

The Duke heaved a heavy sigh.

"It's 'igher hup, Mrs. O'Brien; 'igher hup," he said tragically.

"Thin it's indigestion," she diagnosed.

He shook his head.

"I carn't tell you what it is, so don't arsk me," he sighed. "Time, p'r'aps, 'll cure it."

It dawned upon Mrs. O'Brien that the cause of his trouble might be other than physical.

"Ye haven't had bad news from yir mother?" she inquired kindly.

He answered in the negative, and the old woman definitely made up her mind that he was suffering either from biliousness or indigestion. She made no further allusion to the matter, but the next morning when he came in to breakfast he found a surprise awaiting him. Instead of being allowed to sit down,

as usual, to the nourishment called for by two hours of hard work after rising, he was waylaid by Mrs. O'Brien with a big cupful of black-strong senna tea.

The Duke loathed senna tea with an unutterable loathing. It recalled the periodical medication of early days, attended with much shedding of tears and coercion brought to bear with maternal concern and a pliant cane. The Duke had been emancipated for some years from treatment such as this, and, aside from his disinclination to be dosed when there was no necessity for it that he could see, his dignity rebelled. Mrs. O'Brien, however, had decided that he was badly in need of her medical ministrations, and that settled it. There was only one way in which he could have avoided surrender to her insistence, and that was by incurring her displeasure by flatly defying her, and standing on his right to refuse the well-meant potion. But he wanted to remain on the best of terms with Nora's mother, and would not wittingly do anything to forfeit the good-will for him he knew she entertained. Through her he kept himself informed concerning the object of his secret love. It was an easy matter to start the old lady on the subject of her girls,

and while his interest, discreetly manifested, augmented her consideration for him, it procured also the no inconsiderable happiness of being able to talk of Nora and hear her talked about. He resisted feebly.

"Down with it!" commanded Mrs. O'Brien peremptorily. "Ye're not a baby. Hold yir nose an' ye woan't taste it."

He still hesitated, and she coaxed him.

"Oi'll give yez a lump av sugar after it."

Once again, for the sake of Nora, he sacrificed himself, and under the eyes of the grinning Shrimp swallowed the obnoxious concoction, though every internal organ of his body revolted.

For the best part of the remainder of that day he really was ill, and he was careful thereafter not to let his love-sickness show in presence of Mrs. O'Brien—by gloominess, at any rate. In the stable, however, and out exercising the horses, he was free to let it influence his moods. He liked to utter Nora's name aloud. To him it was as sweet music. Plucking an unusually beautifully tinted leaf left on hedge or tree by the winds of winter, he would dedicate it to her, and wear it next his heart, with a portrait of a woman

he fancied looked something like her that he had cut from a stray page of a newspaper. When no one was nigh he could murmur his secret and his hopes and doubts to Nora's favorite, Lady Belle, and it seemed to him that the creature's big, lustrous eyes regarded him understandingly and sympathetically.

"Lydy Belle," he would tell her, "my Nora's a hactress, a lovely hangel, like the fairies in the pantomine at Droory Lyne an' Sanger's, with pink tights an' wings and spangles, an' the lime-light pl'yin' on 'em. She's too pretty an' good for me naow. Yus, she is. But some d'y the Djuke's goin' to be some-thin', too, an' all the pypers'll be talkin' abaout William Perkins, the gryte jockey. Then you'll see me dash up in me motor to lay me nyme an' fortune at 'er little feet, an' she'll be me blushin' bride. An' Lydy Belle, I'll tyke you, too."

Sometimes, however, this rosy-hued vision was darkened by the gray-black shades of doubt. The attainment of his ambition was a long, a very long way off, and dreaming in the Mallory stables would not bring him one whit nearer to it. Meanwhile, Nora, more beautiful than ever in her tights and spangles,

would attract the admiring attention of the wealth of all the cities she favored by allowing herself to be seen, and what chance would he have against the men of high position and millions who would be tumbling over each other in their eagerness to marry her? This filled him with maddening despair for the time being. He took heart of grace, however, from the fact that she had been much more friendly to him than to the Shrimp, and had shown a marked preference for his company. So strong was his attachment that he felt sure she must reciprocate it. The fact that she had never for a minute shown the slightest evidence of being sentimentally inclined, and that she had so far failed to keep her promise to repay, "at once," the five dollars he had given to the Shrimp to keep him quiet and save her from disgrace, made no difference. He was an optimist by nature. He believed in her, and dared to hope that through some providential happening he would be able to "cut out" her numerous millionaire suitors. In his rare hours of leisure he had, at the cost of much labor and brain-racking, written many letters to her declaring his love, only to tear them up in his fear of sending them.

The Shrimp happened upon him in the stable one day while the Duke was in the throes of one of these epistolatory efforts. The amorous stable-boy was seated on an upturned pail, and drafting his letter with the stump of a pencil on a paper grocery-bag, somewhat crumpled and dirty from having been thrown with other refuse on the garbage-heap, whence he had rescued it as affording a handy medium for recording the phraseologic conceptions of his brain as inspired by the promptings of his heart.

"Writin' po'try! Oh, mother!" sniggered his tormentor.

The Duke did not condescend to respond.

"Take my tip, Dook, an' quit," went on the Shrimp. "It's a sign you got 'em bad when you gits de pome microbe under yer lid. Dere ain't a bundle in de woild as is worth doin' de Shakespeare-act for."

Still the Duke vouchsafed no notice of him.

"Youse thinks she's all to de jampots, don't yer? But take it from me, she couldn't stand no acid-test; she'd be marked down to thirty cents at de bargain scrimmage."

"To 'oo wus you alludin', Mister Mitchell?" demanded the Duke haughtily.

The way of putting the question staggered the Shrimp. He struck a pose, and bowed low.

"To who was I alludin', Mr. Perkins, sir?" he mimicked. "Who'd I be alludin' to if not to yer fr'en' what jiggles her crutch-sticks an' beetle-crushers at that dime-museum in Noo York?"

The Duke remained silent, and the Shrimp went away whistling.

"Say, Dook," he said, retracing his steps and stopping in front of him, "'scuse me fer bein' alive, but, on de level, is it true she's run off wid a ash-can white-wing?"

"You're booboo, ain't yer? Hi dunno what you're talkin' abaout," replied the Duke, whose heart sank within him at the thought that behind the Shrimp's raillery there might be bad news concerning Nora.

"No, ol' chap, I'm not dotty," continued the Shrimp. "I keeps a haff-Nelson an' a double-diamon' cinch on me sense, so's not to let it git away from me. But I seen the old 'ooman a tearin' her hair just now, an' cryin' like she'd been peelin' onions, 'cause de boss

came back from de village widout any mail. 'I know somethin's wrong wid me baby,' she was hollerin'. 'They never write any more. I ain't had a letter from her an' Patsy for a week, an' there was a owl hootin' on de roof last night, an' I put me stockin' on inside out dis mornin'.' Fancy callin' dat peep-show stall a baby! She's a infant fermuminum—I don't *think*."

"An' d'you know what *I* think?" commented the Duke. "I think you're a low-daown mut to talk like that of any gal, 'specially such a nice, respectable gal as Miss O'Brien."

"Aw, g'wan," said the Shrimp, delighted at having achieved his object of "taking a rise" out of the boy. "What d'you know about her? Let's have a decko at yer pome."

He snatched the paper from the Duke's hand, and started away with it. This was the last straw. The Duke bounded up from the pail and dealt his tormentor a blow on the jaw with such force that it sent him to the ground. Then before the Shrimp had recovered his senses sufficiently to realize just what had happened, the Duke had secured the paper, thrust it in his pocket, and was standing over him, quivering with

rage, and inviting him to get up and be "spifflicated." The Shrimp was not slow to respond. He was on his feet in a twinkling and rushing at his adversary. The boys were fighting all over the stable, and the Duke was having the life pounded out of him, when Mallory, attracted by the noise of the scuffle, appeared upon the scene and took a hand. He kicked the Duke through the stable door, and then kicked the Shrimp after him, administering a sound cuffing to each as he did so.

This ended the last duel the boys were ever to engage in, for the same evening there came a telegram for the Duke. It was from his mother in New York, and read:

"Come here by first train. We leave for London on Saturday."

An hour later the Duke, marveling greatly, had bidden good-by to everybody, including the Shrimp, for he was not a boy of grudges, and was on his way to the railroad-station.

The Shrimp's account of Mrs. O'Brien's outburst was a faithful narration of what had occurred. Her mother's heart, pining for Nora, had led her to worry

and into a frame of mind in which it needed only such a combination of dire omens as the hooting owl and the stocking turned inside out to cause her to harbor forebodings of a most alarming and depressing character. Mayhap, also, that intuition which in some natures, at times, attains the degree of a psychological phenomenon—especially in the case of a loved one absent upon whom thought is constantly concentrated—warned her that danger of some kind menaced the girl. There was nothing in the letters from New York calculated to occasion the slightest uneasiness, and the sisters had assured her repeatedly, in answer to her inquiries, that all was very well with them. Yet her mind was not tranquil, and her moping and fears gave both O'Brien and Mallory serious concern.

It was about three months after the departure of the Duke that the offer to purchase Lady Belle came to Mallory. His partner, Crawford, had not returned to Maple Grove after his first visit. Mallory was not exactly facile princeps in the art of letter-writing. He decided that it would be advisable for him to continue the negotiations with McGovern *viva voce*, in New York, where also he could have the benefit of ready

counsel with Crawford. This course seemed the more advantageous in that it would afford him the yearned-for opportunity of spending a few hours with Patsy. He argued, further, that if he gave the old people a treat by taking them with him, Mrs. O'Brien, being able to see with her own eyes and hear with her own ears that everything was all right, would regain at once her cheerfulness and her health, which had begun to suffer.

The joy of the old woman when, at the supper-table, he announced his plan and extended his invitation was a rich recompense for the sacrifice of expense it involved, for Mallory was very fond of her. O'Brien's satisfaction was scarcely less than that of his wife. Doubts and fears were dispelled as though by magic. Mrs. O'Brien recovered there and then her old-time energy. A proposal by Mallory that they should keep the news of their coming from the girls and take them by surprise was adopted with almost childish enthusiasm.

The few days of preparation were busy and lively ones. O'Brien was so glad to see his wife herself again, that he enjoyed the ordering about, admonish-

ing, and snubbing that seemed to be part and parcel of all extraordinary occasions, and from which for several weeks he had been absolved, his spouse having been too apathetic to take an interest in things. The trip was an event of no small importance to both of them. They had not been to New York in many a long year, and had been able to judge of the transformation the city had undergone during that period only from the descriptions given by Patsy when she came home for the holidays, and from the pictorial post-cards the girls sent to them from time to time. Such an overhauling of long-hidden and carefully preserved treasures of the wardrobe the journey necessitated had never occurred in the household. Chief of these—need it be said?—were the Paisley shawl and the black silk dress, the existence of which had been made known to Crawford in such lofty fashion when Nora was sent to fetch Patsy's photographs for him.

Oh, Paisley shawl, pride of our grandmothers and admiration of our grandsires when life's path lay smooth and wide before them, strewn with flowers, made glorious by the sunshine of love, all its turnings, all its quagmires, all its precipitous ascents, perilous or

unscalable, hidden by the fragrant bowers of hope! Vanished with the illusions of youth are the beauties of the shoulders it covered! Stilled or broken or hardened are gentle hearts that beat warmly beneath it! Shriveled and ugly, or wreathed in a different loveliness, are pretty faces that smiled above it! What matters it that the fashion of to-day disdains it and holds it up to ridicule? The memories which the sight of it wrapped around his helpmeet brought to O'Brien were very sweet—sweet as the faint, long-forgotten perfume it diffused and wafted to him when she unfolded it. Once again Delia McNally, pretty and dainty—far prettier than Patsy, prettier far than Nora—imparted to it grace and a charm that love had made irresistible and unequalled. For a brief moment he tasted again something of that ineffable happiness which love brings to mortals only once, and for a space. And when Mrs. O'Brien, with a surprised "Why, Pat!" as he kissed her very, very tenderly, gazed at him and saw the old, dear light in his eyes shining through the tears that moistened them, her own reflected it, and she abandoned her lips to his in a kiss that brought them soul to soul, as in the days of yore,

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when they were thirty years younger, and in all the world were only Delia, Pat, and love.

And the black silk dress, relic also of happier days gone with the snows of yesterday! If, with the Paisley shawl and the bonnet of an earlier generation it was destined to cause passing wonder on Broadway, blasé with fashions of all nations, it was still fashionable and becoming in the sight of the O'Briens, and in donning it Mrs. O'Brien experienced that sense of importance and self-reliance which fine clothes always impart to the wearer, in whatever part of the world he or she may chance to abide, and whether the fine vestment assume the shape of a silk dress or a nose-ring.

As for O'Brien, his frock coat of antiquated build was found, to his wife's intense disappointment and his own intense satisfaction, to have become too small for him; and, backed by Mallory, to whom he appealed with sundry surreptitious and despairing kicks, delivered under the table while the matter was being discussed, he was able to persuade her that the only tall hat he ever owned could not possibly be worn without the frock coat. He had, therefore, to fall back upon a sack of more modern cut, and a new soft felt hat, with which Dan presented him.

At last the great day when the trio found themselves amid the towering buildings of Manhattan arrived. It was early evening when, a little tired from their long journey, but buoyed by excitement and expectancy, they reached the metropolis, and put up at a hotel near Times Square, where Mrs. O'Brien arrayed herself in her gala attire, and Mallory telephoned to Crawford's residence and to McGovern, who promptly followed this call with a visit. Then, after refreshing themselves with a substantial meal, they set off for the theatre, the old couple gleeful at the thought of the glad surprise they had reserved for the girls, and prepared to enjoy the treat of their lives in seeing them act.

It was with much ceremony, and a proud consciousness of the attention she was attracting, that Mrs. O'Brien took her seat in the orchestra, with her husband and Mallory. But soon after she had settled down and looked about her, she was much vexed to discover that she had no fan. This was an awful oversight. How could any one sit in a theatre in a black silk dress and lack a fan!

"Pat," she demanded, in a stage whisper, "didn't Oi have a fan wanst?"

O'Brien, with a very dim recollection that at some remote period she had possessed this coquettish article, replied:

"Oi believe yez did."

"Thin phwy didn't ye think to bring it?" she wanted to know.

"Oi disremimbered that yez had such a thing," he answered apologetically. "Did yez foind it among the clothes?"

"Ye're the most contrariest man," she said, ignoring the question. "Ye nivir think av annything when it's for me. I do belave ye'd forgit yir head if it wasn't screwed on."

"Can't yez use yir handkerchief or yir programme?" he suggested.

"Patrick O'Brien," she exclaimed. "Oi'm ashamed of ye. Wheriver did yez learn such manners?"

O'Brien subsided, and Mallory, telling them he would rejoin them after the first act, went out to seek Crawford. First of all, however, he repaired to the

stage door, and, having ascertained that Patsy was upstairs, sent his message announcing their presence in the theatre.

While Dan was on his way up-town, chuckling at the thought of the astonishment and delight of the girls, the O'Briens were trying in vain to recognize their darlings among the array of beauties on the stage. Throughout the first act the mother was straining her eyes and fidgeting, and demanding of O'Brien whether he could see them. He had to confess that he could not, and a dime-in-the-slot opera-glass failed to aid them, except to the extent of confirming Mrs. O'Brien's pronouncement that none of the girls was Patsy or Nora. At the conclusion of the second act, when they had not appeared, her growing conviction that something was wrong became a certainty, and wild with alarm she started out to investigate.

CHAPTER XVII.

Feeling perfectly safe behind the door which already had sheltered her so effectively, and familiar now with the room, Nora was seated on the bed. She was tired of trying to listen to the conversation she could not hear, except as a confused murmur, and having regained her composure was waiting for Patsy to go, and intending to follow her at once. She realized that Crawford had gone too far, was dangerous, as Patsy had warned her he was, and that it behooved her to be extremely careful. She surmised that her sister had come to get the note, and not hearing her voice raised in anger assumed that Crawford had succeeded in mollifying her, and that everything was going along all right. She wondered at the length of her stay, however, and was getting impatient.

When the door opened brusquely, and Patsy, seeking refuge herself, appeared to her startled gaze, she was too surprised to move. Patsy, as she closed the door

and found herself confronting Nora, was not less startled and astonished. The supper-table standing between them told eloquently enough the tale of what had taken place. Doubt that her sister had fallen victim to Crawford's snares was impossible.

"My God!" she groaned.

Nora had risen to her feet and stood speechless.

Patsy went to her, her eyes blazing and her teeth set.

"What is this?" she demanded.

The girl did not, could not, answer.

"Speak," she ordered, "but whisper. Mom's in the next room."

"Mom!" gasped Nora, if possible, still more terrified.

She raised her hand to her head in a dazed way. Patsy grasped her wrist furiously, and, squeezing it as in a vise, twisted the arm until she forced the girl to her knees.

"Speak, speak, I say," she ordered. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Let go, you are hurting me," whispered Nora, in agony. "I have done nothing wrong."

"Nothing wrong!" hissed Patsy, trembling with grief and passion. "You lie, an' you know you lie. You've been lyin' to me all along. You're in the class with Simpson."

She released her hold, but raised her open hand, with the almost uncontrollable impulse to strike the girl's upturned face.

"I'll let mom in an' show her the thing you are," she said.

Nora threw her arms around her knees and clutched her frantically.

"No, no, not that!" she supplicated. "Listen to me, Patsy. I'm not what you think. Indeed, I'm not. I haven't done anything wrong. Don't let mom see; oh, don't!"

"I wouldn't believe you under oath," said Patsy. "What are you doin' in this man's room, in his bedroom? What's this here blow out? What are you doin' in that dress?"

"I came to get the note. I didn't mean to stay, but I had to."

"Yes, you had to stay to supper."

"He'd have given it to me if you hadn't come."

"He'd a given it to you, at what price, you fool! Didn't I tell you not to come?"

"I had to. I was afraid of pop and mom. Oh, Patsy, don't be hard on me. I know things look queer, but I'm a good girl."

"Let go my legs an' get up. How many times have you been here before? Own up—tell the truth. If you lie I'll kill you."

"Never, it's the very first time."

"Swear it, by the Holy Mother!"

"By the Holy Mother, it's true. I wish I may die if it ain't."

"Swear that you ain't yet gone to the bad."

"I swear it, Patsy. You can believe me. And I'm not going to the bad *ever*."

"You'll go in spite of yourself, in spite of me, in spite of pop an' mom," said Patsy bitterly.

"You haven't any right to say such things," protested Nora. "I've been foolish, perhaps, but I didn't mean to do wrong."

"That's just it. You don't mean to do wrong, but you will—you will, God help us."

"What did you come here for—the note?"

"Yes, and to see if you was here."

"Have you got it?"

"Not yet."

"How did you leave the theatre? I thought you couldn't do it, leading the chorus."

"I didn't ask. When I couldn't find you I hiked to the flat, an' when I saw you wasn't there, I got a hunch you'd be fool enough to come to Crawford's. An' then I heard mom's voice, an' rushed in here, 'cause I couldn't tell her why I was there without tellin' all. I wonder what's she sayin'? They know we're not at the show-shop, an' are huntin' for us, sure pop. Hark! What's that?"

She gripped her sister's shoulder, and a cold sweat broke out upon her brow.

"Oh, my God!" she whispered. "There's Dan!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mallory, after his first interview with Crawford, walked around to the Eighty-sixth Street station of the subway, as his partner had directed, and soon was speeding toward the Long Acre Theatre. He was well satisfied with himself and with his evening's work. The prospective purchaser of Lady Belle had practically agreed to buy the mare, and was merely holding out on the question of price, from which he had attempted to beat the shrewd trainer down. That McGovern would pay the five thousand dollars demanded Mallory was convinced. The racer was a bargain at that figure, but the sale, as he had intimated to Crawford, would mean a good deal to the stable in the shape of prestige, and, besides, the money would enable them to do things. His good humor was heightened by the incident of the female hand and the narrow escape of its owner from being observed. Also by the naïveté of the O'Briens, who had been unable to recognize their daughters in their stage finery. He

knew the girls were there, because the boy who had taken his message had said they were.

When he reached the theatre he could not find the old couple. After hunting about a while he took his seat in the orchestra, thinking they might return there and that, anyhow, he would be able to assure himself that the girls were on the stage. It did not take him long to ascertain that neither of them was in the chorus, and he hastened around to the stage door. There he was told, as the O'Briens had been, that the girls had left before the performance began. It occurred to him that when they received the message he had sent to Patsy it had occasioned such joy and excitement that they had obtained leave of absence, had joined their parents and were waiting about for him somewhere. No doubt they had not seen him when he reentered the theatre.

He was about to return to the front when there happened along the passage the boy to whom he had given the verbal message to Patsy with a pourboire calculated to insure its safe delivery.

"Lookin' for Miss O'Brien?" queried the youth.

"Yes," replied Mallory.

"She's gone; so's her sister," he told him. "Dey had a row."

"Had a row?"

"Yep. 'Pears they had a hair-pullin' match, an' both vamoosed widout tellin' de stage-manager. I guess it's de hinky-dink for dem. He's been fightin' mad ever since. Dey delayed de coitain ten minutes. De call-boy seen de youngest go away in a cab."

"That so," said Mallory, greatly troubled. "Where did they go, d'you know?"

"Nope, but Miss Simpson does, I think."

"Who's Miss Simpson?"

"She's one of de show goils."

Mallory took a dollar from his pocket.

"Can you tell Miss Simpson Mr. Mallory'd like to see her?" he asked.

"Sure!" replied the boy, pocketing the bill and darting off.

In a few minutes he returned.

"Miss Simpson said for you to wait here for her," he announced.

In a little while the woman came down majestically. It was implacable war between her and Patsy.

now, and she was quite willing to carry it to extremes and seize every possible chance to injure her enemy. She knew that Mallory was Patsy's fiancé. Not only was she curious to see him, but the boy had told her that he was looking for Patsy, and she saw a possible opportunity to work further scathe to the girl.

"Are you Mr. Mallory?" she inquired, looking the trainer over with a critical eye. "I suppose you're after Miss O'Brien. The whole town seems to be after her to-night, and everybody is coming to me to tell them where she's gone, as if I was her keeper, and knew or cared."

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you, miss," said Mallory, in his blunt way, though he felt awkward and a little timid in the presence of this tall, handsome woman with the air of an aristocrat. "The boy I sent up told me that he thought you knew where they was."

"I know nothing about them, really," she said, with cold haughtiness, "but I have been given to understand that Nora O'Brien had an appointment this evening with her lover, Mr. Dick Crawford, the sporting man, who keeps her, they say. Probably her sister had a date, also, but I don't know where she is."

Mallory flushed indignantly.

"Well, you tell whoever said such a thing that it's a foul lie," he said hotly, "and if any man says it, I'll fill him so full of lead the devil won't be able to catch him as he tumbles down to hell."

Simpson shrugged her shoulders.

"It's common talk here. You might try Crawford's," she said.

She turned on her heels and walked away.

Mallory went out in a mood to slay. How came Nora's name to be associated with Crawford's in such a way? What could have happened to cause such a story to become the common gossip of the theatre dressing-rooms? Where was she? Where was Patsy? What had they quarreled about? The boy said Nora had gone off in a cab. Patsy, then, was not with her. But why had both of them left the theatre so precipitately when they knew that he and their parents were waiting in front? He remembered the mysterious woman in the other room at Crawford's, and became suspicious. What if there was some ground for this gossip? He could not believe it. Yet how could such talk have originated?

He hastened around to the front entrance again, and as he did so ran into O'Brien. The old man was pacing nervously up and down, and knowing him as he did Mallory saw that he was much agitated. His face brightened as he caught sight of the trainer.

"Ah, Dan, thank Hiven, here ye are at last," he said. "Somethin' tirrible's happened. We can't foind the girls, an' mother's gone to Crawford's to fetch Nora. Oi've only been waitin' for yez to go an' kill that man."

"Have you seen Patsy?" demanded Mallory.

"No," said her father. "Lord knows where she is."

Mallory saw that the old man was in a condition in which he would soon lose control of himself. He took his arm and led him into a saloon to reason with him.

"I heard them tales, too," he said, "an' there's nothin' to 'em, an' if any one comes tellin' me such a thing again I'll twist his neck. I've just come from Crawford's, an' I know what I'm talkin' about. The girls probably didn't get my message an' have gone

off somewhere. I'll go back to Crawford's an' fetch mother. You'd better go to the hotel an' wait for us there. I won't be long."

O'Brien was much relieved to learn that Nora at least was not at Crawford's, but this did not abate his anger aroused by the "information" imparted by the Simpson woman. He wanted to go with Mallory, but the latter, for the same reason that had actuated Mrs. O'Brien, did not desire his company. He desecanted upon the improbability—not to say the absurdity, of the stories told to them—which he resented as much as he (O'Brien) did, and insisted that their falsity was proved by his own visit to Crawford's home. The matter would all be cleared up when they saw the girls, which they would do presently.

After much argument along this line he persuaded the old man to go to the hotel to wait for him, and to be sure that he did go there, accompanied him.

"We'll all go to Patsy's flat, where we'll be sure to find them, when I come back with mother," he said.

CHAPTER XIX.

Endeavoring to appear calm, Crawford greeted his latest caller with a civil:

"Good evening, Mrs. O'Brien."

"Good evenin', Mister Crawford," she answered.

Timid, embarrassed, and in evident distress, she stood near the door.

"Come in. Won't you take a seat?" he asked.

Mrs. O'Brien seated herself diffidently on the edge of the chair nearest to her. The assurance that the ancient Paisley shawl and black silk dress had imparted to her had entirely abandoned her.

"Thank you, sor. Oi hope ye'll pardon the intrusion," she said, her voice quavering.

"Intrusion! Oh, it's no intrusion, I assure you," he said encouragingly. He felt that this time his task of getting rid of his caller would be an easy one.

"Oi'm in great trouble, Mister Crawford," she informed him.

"Yes?" he answered interrogatively.

"Oi've had a tirrible froight. I can't foind trace av me girls. We came up from Maple Grove intindin' to surproise them, an' they ain't there."

"Dear me! How's that, I wonder!"

"Oi doan't know, an' Oi doan't know phwat to do."

"Can I be of any assistance to you?"

"Yis. That is, Oi've somethin' to ask ye, Mr. Crawford. Promise ye won't take offenise at an' old woman, sor."

"Of course I'll not take offense. Go ahead."

He seated himself to listen.

"Do yez know ought of me Nora?"

Crawford looked puzzled.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Mallory was here jist now, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Yez was here whin O'Brien tiliphoned?"

"Yes. He said you didn't recognize your daughters on the stage."

"Oi did not, an' for a good reason. They wasn't there. Oi was so skeered Oi couldn't wait for Danny, so O'Brien an' me found our way to the back door of the theatre, thinkin' they might be in their dressin'-rooms?"

"And weren't they?"

"The man there wouldn't let us in, but Oi raised sich a shindy that they had to take notice av us. Somebody sent down an iligant lady, a Miss Simpson. She said they didn't know where Patsy was, but that maybe Nora had gone to—to Mr. Crawford's. She give me the address. First we wint to the place where they live. There was no one there. Thin O'Brien was for comin' here with me, but he's hasty, an' Oi thought he moight offend you, so Oi told him to wait at the theatre for Danny."

"Well," said Crawford, rising to signify that the interview was at an end, "I'm sorry I am unable to give you any assistance, but if you can think of any way in which I can be of service to you, why, I shall be very glad to do what I can, Mrs. O'Brien. Good evening."

The old woman, who had also risen, hesitated.

"How comes my Nora's name to be linked with yours?" she questioned falteringly.

"Oh, that's merely chorus girls' gossip. I've tried to be nice to both of your daughters because of my

friendship to you and O'Brien, and I suppose that set the others talking. You mustn't take any notice of such things."

"'Tis meant kindly, sir, Oi'm sure, but it has done harm, for phwat that young lady told me made me ashamed for me darlin'. She said—she said—oh, Mr. Crawford—she said: 'She's probably gone off to a spree-supper with her lover, an' is wurrukin' him for tips or diamonds.'"

The old woman reddened with shame and confusion.

Crawford's worst suspicions of Nora were confirmed beyond question by this remark of the Simpson woman.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. O'Brien," he said, reddening also, but with annoyance. "I meant no harm, and it's a pretty tough thing when a gentleman can't even be polite to a girl without such things being said."

"It is, indade," she agreed. "An' it's relieved Oi am to find she isn't here. She an' Patsy's off somewhere together most loikely."

"Quite probably," he agreed. "I think you said they didn't expect you?"

"Yis. We wanted to surprouise thim. Danny sent in word at the theatre, but Oi misdoubt they got it. Oi'll just be goin' along. Thank ye, Mr. Crawford, for yir koindness."

He shook hands with her, and was escorting her out when the valet appeared, and announced that Mallory was at the door. Even as he spoke, the trainer brushed past Rogers and entered the room. There was wrath in his eye, and an ugly expression of determination on his face.

"I followed you, mother," he explained, addressing Mrs. O'Brien in loud tones. "O'Brien told me you'd come here to fetch Nora."

"She's not here, Danny, praise the Lord," the old woman announced.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mallory.

"Phwat d'ye mean, Danny?" she asked.

"Yes. I'd like to know what you mean by such an intimation," said Crawford, with rising choler. He did not like his partner's attitude at all.

"Miss Simpson was very positive that Nora had come to see you, and she said things about your carry-in' on with her that, if I thought was true, I'd——"

"You'd what? Miss Simpson had no right to make any such assertions, and if she was positive that the girl had come here, I'm just as positive that she has not."

This was said with such emphasis and apparent sincerity that Mallory cooled down, but he was not satisfied.

"Then who was the woman in that room when I was here before?" he demanded.

Crawford was astounded. How could Mallory have known that anybody was in there?

"What woman?" he asked.

"The woman you hid when I was announced—the woman who, thinkin' I was gone, came out of that room while you were at the telephone—the woman who slunk back again when she saw I was still here. I saw her hand closin' the door."

"Are yez decaivin' me, Mr. Crawford?" demanded Mrs. O'Brien pitifully. "For the love av God don't tell me me Nora's there!"

"I have already told you, Mrs. O'Brien, that I know nothing about your daughter—that Nora's not here.

Mr. Mallory's talking nonsense," Crawford assured her. "Besides, if I did have a lady in there, it's none of his business."

"Sure, Danny, Mr. Crawford's given you his wurrud," she said, once more relieved. "Come away, bhoy."

Mallory, however, was a man who, when once roused, could not be easily appeased, and hesitated at nothing. What the Simpson woman had told him had stirred him to fierce anger, and he was determined to get at the truth regardless of consequences. He argued that if such things were said there must be some cause. There was no smoke without fire.

"I'll come away when I've had a look through that other room," he said doggedly.

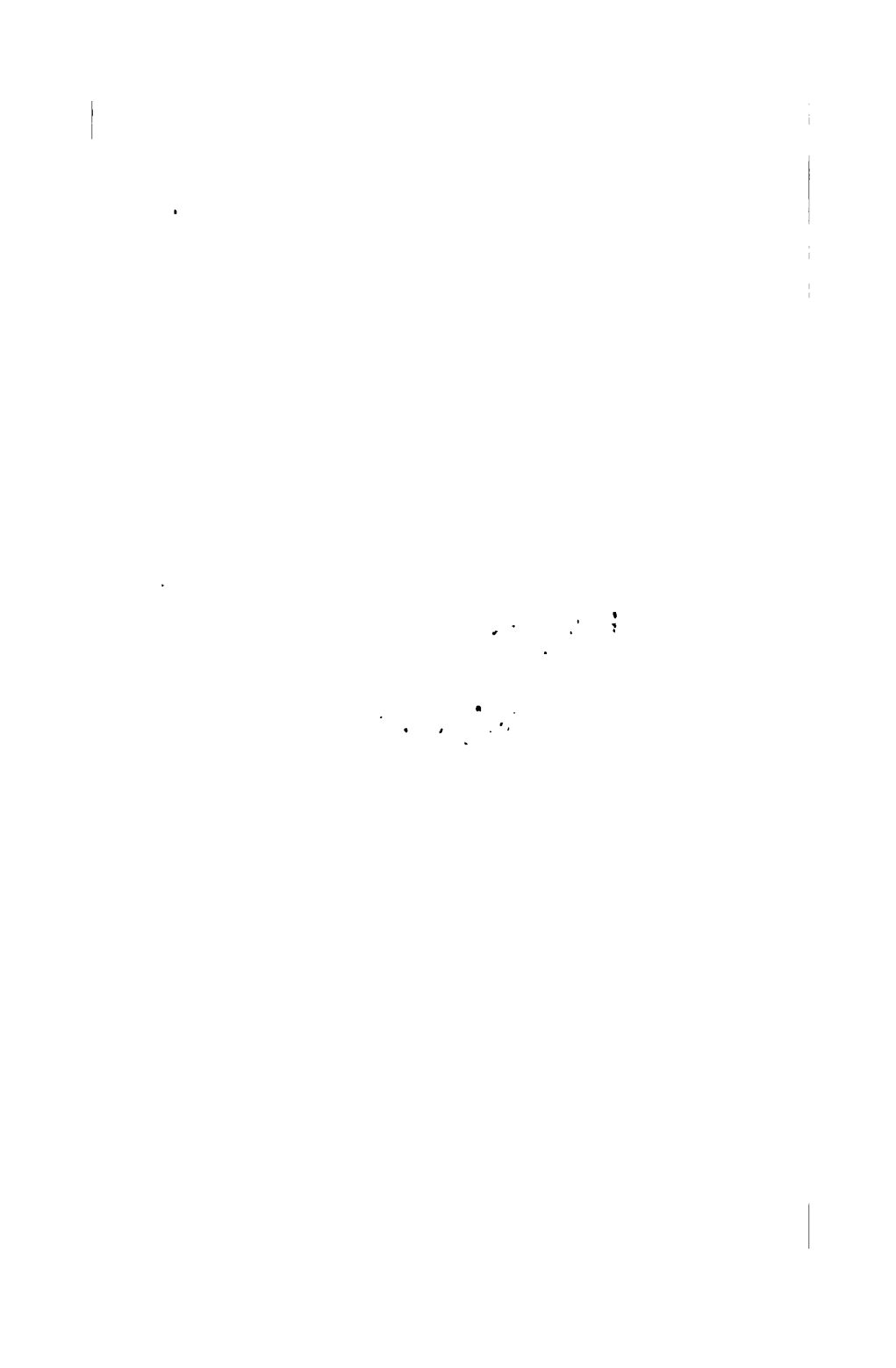
"You'll not look through that room or any other," replied Crawford, ugly in turn. "And you'll oblige me by getting out of this house altogether, and at once."

"Yes, come away, Danny," pleaded Mrs. O'Brien.

"You can't fool me. I know what I seen an' I'm goin' to find out if the owner of that hand's Nora, if she's still there," insisted Mallory.



HIS BRUQUE, VIOLENT ACTION JERKED HER INTO THE ROOM AS THE DOOR FLEW OUTWARDS.



He walked toward the door, but Crawford intercepted him. The struggle that ensued was a brief one, briefer than the time required to recount it. Mallory flung Crawford aside and pulled open the door. Patsy had been listening with bated breath, her hand grasping the handle. His brusque, violent action jerked her into the room as the door flew outward.

Unable to credit his senses, the trainer staggered from her, white as a sheet.

Patsy hurled the door back before any one could look into the room, and stood in front of it, facing him.

For a moment no one spoke, Mallory and Mrs. O'Brien trying to comprehend it. Mallory was the first to speak.

"There's the owner of the hand," he said brokenly, "and when I seen it the arm was bare!"

Mrs. O'Brien sank into a chair.

"You that Oi thought was as good as gold," she moaned.

"I'm not what you both think," said Patsy quietly.

"Not what we think!" retorted Mallory, becoming

stern. "Then what brings you here in the night to this man's rooms? Answer me. What brings you here?"

She returned his gaze calmly.

"I came to see Mr. Crawford on a matter of business," she told him.

The mother rose, crushed with shame and sorrow.

"Come away with us, girl," she said.

"I can't," answered Patsy.

"You can't, why not?" Mallory demanded.

"You had better go," Crawford advised her.

Her mother urged her again:

"Come, Patsy, yir father may follow us here at anny moment."

"Yes, go, it will be better. I don't want a scene with O'Brien," declared Crawford.

Mallory, who had moved to the passage-door, turned to say to him:

"O'Brien was right; he never trusted you, you blackguard—destroyin' the daughter of the man that made you welcome in his home—deceivin' him—deceivin' me that believed in you—deceivin' her, bringin' shame on her. By God—I'll——"

He rushed at Crawford. Patsy interposed.

"Don't quarrel, Dan," she implored. "I've had enough to bear. I don't want to separate you two. Think what you'll lose."

"Lose?" replied Mallory, with bitter rage. "I've lost everything, losin' you. We're down an' out from now, Crawford, down an' out—you understand?"

"As you please," answered Crawford coolly. "And now that our affairs are in a measure settled——"

"Settled! We've just begun."

Mallory glared at him and set his teeth grimly.

"No—no, Dan," pleaded Patsy. "I know everything's dead against me—but you don't know—you don't know——"

"We know you've brought disgrace on me an' yir old father an' Nora," sobbed her mother. "Where is she? Phwat have ye done with me baby—you that was to watch over her?"

"I've taken care of her, all right," replied Patsy humbly.

Mallory laughed a harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"Yes, you have—by passin' her off to them girls at the theatre as this man's mistress," he said.

"Who told you that?" she questioned sharply.

"A Miss Simpson. Didn't you lead 'em to think that Nora was comin' to his rooms when it was yourself? Where is she?"

"I don't know where she is—we've quarreled," she replied, passing her hand wearily over her forehead.

"About this man, most likely?" sneered Mallory.

"Yes—about this man," she admitted.

Her mother looked at her with scornful anger.

"Come," she said. "It'll do no good to stay."

"Mrs. O'Brien's right," assented Crawford, whose patience was fast being strained to the breaking-point.

"Mallory, I advise you to go. I've had a few hard things said to me to-night, and I'm not in the humor for any more."

"You'll have a few hard things done to you before I get through with you," retorted Mallory, glaring at him.

Patsy pleaded with him again.

"Don't! Please go," she urged. "I can explain, but not now. You've got to trust me, that's all."

"I did trust you—I trusted him—an' you've both made a fool of me."

"I can make it all right with you. Take mom away now."

He turned on her savagely.

"You can make it all right with me, can you?" he cried. "I suppose you thought when you got through with him an' he cast you off you'd fall back on me, the patient, good-natured fool down in the country that didn't know nothin', that wasn't wise to the kind of man he's turned out to be, nor to the sort you've proved yourself to be. He's one of the rich men you professed to be so willin' to give up for me. Well, you needn't. If money counts for more than love—you're welcome to it, and to him."

The injustice of her treatment, Dan's readiness to believe ill of her without waiting to give her a chance to have a heart-to-heart explanation with him, stung poor Patsy to the quick.

"Love!" she cried scornfully. "A lot you know about it. Love is trust, an' you're the man I banked on, an' the first minute I puts you to the test you falls down hard. If you think I'm bad you can think it. I'm through with you."

Patsy's outburst not only carried no conviction to her fiancé, it aroused the anger and resentment of Mrs. O'Brien, in whose mind there was no doubt of her daughter's guilt.

"Have ye no shame—to stand there an' brazen it out before the man that loved yez?" she said hotly. "Let us be goin', Danny, l'ave her father to settle with this man."

But Mallory was beginning to understand what it all meant to him, what he had lost, the significance of the foundering of his hopes. The pain and misery of the heart-wrenching his separation from Patsy would mean were already beginning to make themselves felt. All his rage and sorrow, all his humiliation, all his jealous hate surged within him, prompting him to kill the man who had blasted his life.

"No!" he answered. "D'you think he's goin' to wreck her life an' wreck all my hopes an' go scot-free? No—he's goin' to answer to me—here—now."

Crawford on his part was beside himself with exasperation. He had had more than enough of the complicated mess his intrigue with Nora had stirred up. He was not lacking in physical courage, and had

no fear of Mallory, but he was afraid of the notoriety and ridicule a "row" of this kind would bring upon him if it attracted outside attention, as a scuffle inevitably would do.

"I'm not going to fight with you," he said angrily. "I'm not going to have my name mixed up in a dirty scandal with a lot of race-track hangers-on and chorus girls. I've had enough of this. I've had enough of the lot of you. You'll leave my house, and at once, all of you—every last one of you."

He moved toward Patsy, with the intention of driving Nora from the bedroom and bundling the whole family out.

Patsy divined his purpose.

"No, don't do that," she whispered quickly and despairingly, seizing his arm. "Not after all I've *done*. There won't be any scandal—there won't be any fight—I'll get rid of them, leave it to me."

Crawford could not but respect her grit and devotion. He turned from the door and Patsy advanced toward Mallory.

"Why don't you leave us?" she demanded coldly. "What do you want me to do? What more do you

want me to say? I love this man, he's everything to me and you're nothin' to me."

Mallory and her mother gazed at her stunned, shocked by this declaration.

"Don't stand lookin' at me like that—go—go——" she ordered impatiently.

Slowly Mallory and Mrs. O'Brien went out.

Patsy and Crawford stood gazing after them until the sound of the shutting of the front door by Rogers apprised them that they had really gone. Then Patsy's tortured heart could bear no more, and she burst into tears. A long-drawn "Oh—o—o," escaped through her quivering lips, and she stiffened and twisted her arms in her suffering.

Crawford was moved by the sight to a semblance of generosity.

"You needn't mind about that money—you needn't pay," he said patronizingly, taking a seat by the table.

The man's cynical assumption that to a woman in her station of life money was a salve the application of which would there and then heal all heart-wounds, dry all tears, make wrong seem right, was too much for the girl, already goaded to the verge of distrac-

tion. She dashed the tears from her eyes with her hand and turned upon him passionately.

"Needn't pay! I needn't pay!" she ejaculated. "I *have* paid—paid with my good name, with my mother's trust—with the love of the man I've loved all my life. That's what I've paid to save my little sister from you—you beast! I suppose you and your kind think when you take some poor devil of a girl starvin' for a little comfort, a minute or two of happiness, an' make her a thing that good women won't look at—I suppose you think your measly money pays—pays for the homes you ruin, the mothers' hearts you break, the girls you send to hell! You pay? No! It's the woman that pays—and pays—and pays!"

She walked to the bedroom door and flung it open.

"Come, Nora!" she commanded. "You're safe now."

Nora came forth, and without another word the two girls left.

Crawford, who had listened to Patsy's scathing rebuke shamefacedly, bent forward, with his arms on his knees, did not even look up as they passed him on their way to the street.

CHAPTER XX.

For a time after Mallory had left him O'Brien "consumed himself with patience," but the minutes, that seemed to have lengthened into a thousand seconds each, accumulated until his absence, which was to have lasted half an hour, just the time to bring Mrs. O'Brien back, had extended considerably over an hour. The old man could contain himself no longer, and started after Mallory and his wife.

Meanwhile Crawford had been reviewing the exciting events that had succeeded each other so quickly that night and almost had culminated in a disgraceful fight. First there was Nora, with her rôle of innocence so cleverly played, who had been getting money and presents out of him and fooling him. He was entirely cured of any infatuation he had felt for her. Then there was Patsy who for the second time had dressed him down, sat upon him, and rubbed it in by putting him through the disagreeable process of being

shown up to himself. Finally there was the low stableman with whom he had associated, who had bullied him and threatened him with personal violence. With Mallory, at least, he would get even, and at once, by immediate dissolution of partnership and pressure for settlement of their affairs. This, he knew, would put Mallory to sore straits, owing to his lack of ready money and the onerous conditions of their contract. Mallory, in fact, would be placed in such a position that he would not be able to carry on the stable. Practically it would mean ruin for him, and, therefore, for the whole O'Brien family. From this prospect Crawford derived some consolation for his wounded feelings and ruffled temper.

"I'll teach the whole dirty crowd that they bucked up against the wrong man," he muttered. "I'll have those girls fired from the Long Acre not later than to-morrow, and it won't be my fault if they succeed in getting, or, at least, in keeping, another engagement in little old New York."

He was pacing up and down, savoring in advance the fruit of revenge, when Rogers announced that O'Brien wished to see him.

"Tell O'Brien to go to Hades, and throw him down the elevator-shaft if he gives you any back talk," he ordered.

"Very good, sir," said the valet.

"No, let him come in," called Crawford, suddenly changing his mind.

O'Brien, hat in hand, was ushered in.

Crawford received him defiantly.

"What do you want?" he demanded shortly.

"Oi came after me woife, who came to fetch Nora," replied the old man, his blue eyes fixing him fearlessly.

"Your wife went away from here with Mallory some time ago," said Crawford. "The whole family appears to be coming here one after the other."

"God knows Oi doan't want to trouble ye anny, an' Oi didn't come here to pay no social call," retorted the old man, "but Oi've a roight to fetch me own woife, an' a roight to know if it's true that Nora comes here."

"Ask your wife, ask Mallory. I've told them all I intend to say. I'm tired of answering to one set of fools a pack of lies told by other fools, and I'm through with the whole gang. All I get for taking an

interest in your precious girls and being kind to them is ingratitude and abuse. Here's a note for three hundred dollars I lent them to get them out of a hole. It's signed with your name, as you can see. Here, take it, and give it to them as a souvenir, if they or you haven't the decency to make good."

He handed the note to the old man, who gazed alternately at him and the paper, too bewildered to comprehend it for a moment.

"D'ye mean to say me girls borrowed three hundred dollars av ye in my name?" he asked.

"That's what they did," affirmed Crawford. "And it's up to you to pay."

"Oi can't pay!" said the old man, aghast. "Oi haven't got three hundred dollars in the world, leave alone in me pocketbook."

Crawford shrugged his shoulders, and, refusing the paper O'Brien held out to him, turned on his heels.

"Well, being swindled out of three hundred dollars more or less won't ruin me," he said. "I suppose it was only what I ought to have expected, seeing the class of people I have been fool enough to deal with."

The old man put his hand on the fellow's shoulder and swung him around.

"See here, Mr. Crawford," he said calmly, but with a hard glitter in his eyes. "Oi'm no swindler, an' no fool, but an honest man, Oi'd have ye onderstand. Oi can hold up me head before me Maker an' say that no one in the world or out of it iver lost a penny owed by me, or suffered anny wrong done by me. Oi doan't know phwat this means. Oi doan't know yit the meanin' av annything Oi've heered this night. But Oi will know, an' that moighty soon, an' those that disarve it will git all that's comin' to them, whoever they may be, ye can bank on that."

"All right," answered Crawford sarcastically. "there's three hundred dollars coming to me."

The old man went out without saying good night, and started down-town, grimly determined to get at the bottom of this matter of the note, of the disappearance of his daughters, and of all that he had heard. In presence of Crawford, to whom he had gone with the idea of finding out what there was to the stories that linked Nora's name with his, and of "skinning him alive," as he had mentally expressed

it, if he found even the remotest justification for the suspicion that Crawford had been trying to lead her astray, he had stood confounded by the evidence of the debt contracted. For what possible purpose could the girls have needed three hundred dollars? For furnishing their flat? No, this, they had told him, had been done on the instalment-plan, and everything had been paid up. Then for what? And how had they dared to sign his name to this promise of payment?

In his bewilderment he did not take notice of where he was going, and getting on the wrong side of the street boarded an up-town car. He did not discover his error until the car came to a stop at the extremity of the line. By the time he reached the hotel where Mallory had instructed him to wait it was nearly one o'clock in the morning. There Mallory had left word for him to join them at the home of the girls.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was Rochefoucauld who remarked that our virtues disappear when put in competition with our interests, as rivers lose themselves in the ocean. This observation applied in a measure to Nora O'Brien. Self-abnegation, "that rare virtue that good men preach and good women practise," and which entered so largely into Patsy's moral make-up, was wholly lacking in that of her younger sister. Nora had been unable to hear all of the conversation that followed Patsy's egress from the bedroom, but she had been able to catch enough from Mallory's loud tones to understand what was happening. Very soon it had become clear to her that the entire opprobrium of the situation brought about by her own foolishness and the efforts of her sister to save her was being borne by Patsy. She had heard the voice of her mother raised in denunciation of the girl, and Mallory's bitter taunt, indicating that all between them was over, but she had not had the courage to go out and face her share of the

"music," to clear Patsy by telling the truth. Crawford's outburst had frightened her, and she had remained trembling, fearful of the outcome, and allowed her sister to sacrifice herself. Nor had she breathed easily until Patsy had called her forth with the assurance that there was no further danger.

So long as she herself had escaped nothing mattered much. Mallory's break with Patsy did not strike her as being serious. Patsy would easily be able to square herself with him by explaining the facts, and they between them would find some means of hushing them up and of placating her mother. And, anyhow, it was Patsy's own fault. What did she want to follow her about for, and mix up in things that did not concern her? She forgot that she had looked to her sister to help her out of the predicament in which she had found herself at the theatre, and her fear of facing her parents because of the forged note. All she cared to remember was that she had been certain of getting the note herself. It was true she had been afraid of Crawford. The violence of his declaration of love had alarmed her. But she felt sure that he would not have persisted in face of her protest, for

he was such a nice man and liked her so much. The more she thought about it the more she came to look upon herself as a martyr to Patsy's interfering proclivities and assumption of the right to boss her. She was deeply resentful also of Patsy's rough treatment of her in the bedroom, and of the fact that her sister should have dared to suspect her of having "gone to the bad." The net result of this meddling, as she figured it, was that Patsy had stirred up a row between Crawford and Mallory that had caused them to end their partnership, got herself into trouble with Mallory and her mother, offended Crawford so deeply that it was doubtful whether her own former pleasant relations with him, which might have ended in a brilliant marriage, could be resumed, and, after all, had not succeeded in getting the note.

The latter fact Nora ascertained by questioning Patsy when they found themselves in the street. The reflections outlined above came afterward, while a cab which Patsy fetched herself while Nora remained in the hallway at her sister's request so that she should not walk on the street in her satin slippers, was bearing them to their home. The journey was made in

silence, save for Nora's query and Patsy's answer to it. When the cab neared the street in which they lived Patsy, saying that she would come later, alighted and let Nora drive on.

"Tell 'em you was took sick before the show an' had to come home," was her parting injunction.

Patsy had no heart to enter the flat, where she thought her parents must be by that time. She wanted a chance to think and decide upon a plan of action. She had been too unnerved by what she had been through to be able readily to collect her thoughts, but as she walked on heedless of where she was going the significance of what she had brought upon herself for her sister's sake forced itself upon her. What hurt her more than even her mother's words and belief in her guilt—and they burned to her very soul—was that Dan should have doubted her and cast her off with brutal scorn. The idea that he would not understand that something grave and extraordinary must have led to her presence there, that he would not trust her and wait for her explanation, would never have occurred to her even if she had had time to think before she took the desperate step she did to prevent

the discovery of Nora and the supper-table in the bedroom. On the spur of the moment she had confidently thought that her statement that she had come to Crawford's rooms on business would suffice. She could not understand that her appeal to him to trust her had not been wholly sufficient, as a similar appeal from him to her in such circumstances would have been pending opportunity to hear what he had to say.

There arose in her mind the memory of the first and only semblance of a disagreement between them prior to this night, when she had announced her intention of going on the stage soon after their betrothal. She recalled what she had said:

"You've got to trust me for good an' all—trust me without a string to it—in all places an' all things. You've got to believe in me as I believe in you."

And his reply:

"You're all right, little one. I will trust you at all times, in all things."

She had believed in him unswervingly during all the years since then, never doubting his loyalty, never believing that he was as other men she saw, and ever could or would let his thoughts dwell upon another

woman, confident in his love, confident that he would remain true in every sense to the spirit of their troth and await with her the apotheosis of their romance, the supreme reward of their patience, in their union forever. Sure as she was of herself in her love for him, her mind never could have conceived the idea that he would ever seriously harbor the notion that the wealth of another man might hold attraction for her. Although he had intimated at the time of her last visit home that the thought of it worried him, she had dismissed the subject with her playful rejoinder and straightway forgotten it. Now, at the first real test, he had broken his pact and credited her with baseness of the most ignoble kind.

"I suppose you thought when you got through with him an' he cast you off you'd fall back on me, the patient, good-natured fool down in the country who wasn't wise to the sort you've proved to be."

The words whirled in her head. Had Dan really delivered himself of such an infamous utterance to her, his affianced wife, who had borne so much for him? There was no evading the hideous reality of it. He had said it, and spurned her ruthlessly, treated her

as though she had been a woman of the streets. This was the trust of a man! This was the end of her dream of bliss. It was all over, over with everybody. She could not explain to her mother and the latter would tell her father, and he, too, would shut his heart to her. There was nothing left for her in the world. She had lost all. Distracted by her despair and misery, she ran, rather than walked—ran straight before her, and people turned and gazed after her curiously. On she hurried until she brought up exhausted at a line of cars that blocked her way. Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, heedless of where it went, she boarded the car that had stopped in front of her. She wanted only to sit down. There were few people in the car, and she did not look upon them with seeing eyes. The courage, the knowledge of the world, the qualities of pluck and clear judgment that had enabled her to hold her own in all circumstances had deserted her utterly for the time being, in her wretchedness. Her nerve was gone. The blow was too much even for such a brave little woman to bear up under.

"South Ferry! All out!" shouted the conductor.

Mechanically she descended from the car and walked slowly over to Battery Park. The solitude of the place at that hour appealed to her. She wanted to get away from the noise, the lights, the people. But from the lights she could not escape. They were everywhere. They piled in mountains all about her. They cast long golden sheens from the passing ferry-boats. Their gaiety seemed to mock her. She walked toward the water-front, and a policeman twirling his night-stick advanced upon her out of the shadow.

"Hi!" he shouted gruffly, "where are you goin'? What d'you want?"

His rude tones startled her and recalled her to herself.

"I'm going to the subway," she answered, at a venture.

"Well, that ain't the way to the subway you want, an' you know it," he replied. "Get t'ell out of it, an' if I find you around here again to-night I'll run you in, see?"

Greatly frightened, she retraced her steps, walking hurriedly.

As she neared the car-tracks again a man who had followed her at a distance from the time she had left the car accosted her.

"Excuse me, Miss Patsy," he said, raising his hat. "Are you ill? 'As anything 'appened? Can I 'elp you?"

Surprised, she looked at him, but failed to recognize him.

"How'd you know my name? I don't know you," she answered.

"*Hi'm* William Perkins—you know, the Djuke they used to call me at Myple Grove."

And the Duke he was, but it was small wonder that Patsy had failed to recognize him. The generally 'dirty sweater-clad stable-boy was miraculously transformed. He was as spick and span as a new pin. A smart tan overcoat opened upon a suit of a loud check and distinctly English cut. A hard felt hat and gloves to match the top-coat gave an added air of distinction to him, as also did his black patent-leather shoes, straight collar, and soft red tie set off with a real diamond horseshoe pin.

"I wus in a Broadway car just naow," he went on, "an' recognized you, but you seemed in such trouble an' so anxious to be let alone that I didn't like to speak to you, but when I see you go across Battery Plyce at this time o' night an' lookin' so ill I was afryd somethin' wus the matter, an' took the liberty of followin' you. I 'ope you don't mind. If there's anything I can do——"

This meeting, following the incident with the policeman, had the effect of restoring Patsy wholly to her senses. In common with everybody at Maple Grove she had liked the Duke from the little she had seen of him there, because he always had been obliging and cheery.

"Yes, I've been under the weather an' upset a bit," she told him. "I feel like I'd drop. I'd be real grateful if you'd put me on an Eighth Avenoo car. They go from somewhere hereabouts, don't they?"

"Ow now, not a tram, but a keb, *hif* you'll allaow me, Miss Patsy," he said. "But 'adn't you better 'ave somethin' fust? I'm sure you need it."

"Nix for the cab," she replied. "I could do with a cup of coffee, though."

The Duke, however, would not have considered it the part of gallantry or the proper thing at all to put Nora's sister on a car when the unexpected privilege of acting as her escort had fallen to him. He looked around, but there was no cab in sight.

"There's a plyce just across the w'y what keeps open all night," he said. "We can get some cawffee there, if you'd rather not 'ave anythin' stronger."

Patsy refused anything stronger. With profound diffidence, he offered her his arm. Feeling faint, she leaned upon it gladly, and they were soon installed at a table with some hot coffee before them.

The Duke was not a little proud of the honor done to him, and sought to cheer his companion up by chatting animatedly. With instinctive delicacy, however, he refrained from questioning her, but talked about himself. Patsy had not heard of his departure from Maple Grove. He told how he had been summoned from there by a telegram from his mother to go to England, and that he had arrived in New York on his return from that country that very day.

"I went to the Long Acre Theatre this hevenin', but I didn't see Miss Nora or you," he said.

"No," she replied, "we wasn't there."

He saw from the absent look in her eyes that she was not listening to half of what he said.

"P'r'aps you'd like to go 'ome now?" he suggested.

"Home!" she echoed wearily. "Oh, yes. What time is it? Gee! it's after twelve o'clock."

Requesting her to remain where she was for a moment and to excuse him, the Duke went out and in a few minutes returned with a cab.

"You're awful good," she said, "as he helped her in. "I don't know how to thank you."

"You can best do that by forgettin' it," he answered. "Good night, Miss Patsy."

He added, as the vehicle started in response to his signal:

"Don't p'y the kebbby, 'e's 'ad 'is fare."

She had given the address of her home, because she could think of no other place, but she dreaded to go. Her parents would be there, and Dan, also, probably. What would they say to her—what could she say to them? They would renew their reproaches, heap contumely upon her, and she could not clear herself. If only they had not told her father. The bare possi-

bility of this gave her a little courage. Perhaps they had all gone to bed. She hoped so. She was too tired, too run down, to think much. If she could get to her room unperceived and rest her aching head, she might know better what to do in the morning.

One thing was sure, she would have nothing more to do with Dan after the way he had treated her. Another thing also was sure, she would not be able to return to the Long Acre Theatre after having left the stage-manager in the lurch, as she had done. This did not trouble her much. She did not want to return there. She and Nora would go away somewhere, procure an engagement with a company on tour that would take them far from everybody, and from New York. Some day they would find out, perhaps, how unjust they had been to her, and Dan would be sorry, but she would never forgive him.

At the thought that all was over between them, of the failure of her hopes that had sustained her through all the years of her trials and struggles, she began to weep.

"Oh, Dan, Dan!" she sobbed. "How could you! Oh, how could you!"

The cab came to a stop in front of the house. She ascended the stairs slowly, and at the door of her flat hesitated, still dreading to go in, but feeling that she must.

"Help me, God," she prayed. "I ain't done nothin' wrong, an' I don't deserve this. I couldn't give my little sister away!"

As quietly as possible she opened the door and entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

The gas was turned down in the parlor when Patsy entered. Quiet as she had been, Nora had heard her turn the key in the lock, and advanced to meet her, in a wrapper and with a handkerchief tied around her forehead.

"Are they here?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, don't talk loud," whispered Nora. "Mom's asleep. Dan's gone out to hunt for pop."

"Did you beat 'em here?"

"Yes."

"Gee! that was luck," said Patsy, turning up the gas. "I was scared green. What d'you tell 'em?"

"What you said, that I took sick before the show and had to come home."

"Did they say anything about me?"

"Asked me if I knew where you were. I said I left you at the theatre."

"That's good," sighed Patsy, removing her hat and coat.

"Where have you been since you left me in the cab?" questioned Nora.

"Oh, I've been ridin' around on cars tryin' to get up nerve enough to face pop. I'd 'a' given my eye-tooth to 'a' kept this from him. It's too late now. Mom'll tell him everything."

"Yes," assented Nora. "That's what's been worrying me. What did you run to hide from mom for? Why didn't you stick it out in some way? You could have told her a story of some kind, and it would have been all right. You weren't like me, you had your hat and coat and street-clothes on."

"I got rattled," she confessed.

"Yes, and you've got us into a pretty mess, haven't you?" grumbled Nora. "You brought it all on yourself. You had no business following me. I won't be followed."

"Lucky I did follow an' find you before it was too late."

"Too late? Stuff and nonsense! You're always thinking bad of people. You haven't helped me by butting in, and you've only gotten yourself into trouble."

"D'you s'pose I thought I run any risk with Dan?" demanded her sister. "S'pose I thought for a minute he wouldn't trust me—wouldn't believe I was true an' good, no matter how appearances was against me?"

"Don't you think he'll make up?"

"I don't know, an' I don't care. Serves me right. If I'd kept my promise to mom to watch over you 'stead of bein' so took up with my own happiness that I let you run around with that Simpson woman, it all needn't 'a' happened. I'm to blame, an' I got to pay for it, that's all."

"What it serves you right for is treating me like a kid," commented Nora. "I don't want to be watched over, and, what's more, I won't be. I'm a woman, like you, earning my living, like you. Don't worry on my account. I can take care of myself. There's no call for you to do it."

"That's where you're wrong," rejoined Patsy, in unoffended tone. "You ain't got no head. You couldn't take care of yourself if you was alone in a ten-acre field, not to talk of a city full of sharks like New York. But nobody's goin' to put you in the soup if I can help it."

"All right, you've got all the head. Let it go at that. How are we going to get the money for the note? That's what I'd like to know."

"We'll have to save it out of what we earn. There's no other way."

"Couldn't you get it from Dan?"

Patsy looked at her for a few moments before she replied, but there was neither anger nor reproach in her gaze; only sorrow and weariness.

"Ask Dan Mallory for money!" she said brokenly. "Ain't there any limit to what you want me to do for you? Ask him for money! I'd scrub floors first."

She seated herself on the sofa and bent forward, covering her eyes with her hands.

"I'm dead to the world," she murmured. "Make me a cup of coffee, will you?"

Nora went out to comply with the request. At the door she glanced around and saw that her sister was crying.

She had scarcely turned her back when there came a ring at the bell. Patsy sprang up and quickly wiped her tears away. The ring brought Mrs. O'Brien from an inner room.

"So ye've come home, have ye?" she said, going to open the door.

Patsy remained silent.

The person at the door was Mallory. He entered and glanced at Patsy, but offered no word of greeting.

"Where's Patrick?" queried Mrs. O'Brien.

"I dunno," answered Mallory, throwing his hat on a chair. "He'd left the hotel, an' I hunted for him everywhere, but I couldn't find him, an' gave it up. I left word at the hotel for him to come on to the flat, if he turned up again, as no doubt he will. I got tired of waitin', an', besides, I thought he might 'a' come here by this time."

"Haven't you two seen pop yet?" ventured Patsy timidly.

"No," growled Mallory, without looking at her.

A ray of hope shone in the girl's eyes.

"Then I want——" she began hesitatingly.

"Want phwat?" snapped her mother.

Patsy advanced toward them eagerly.

"I want you both to promise me that you won't say nothin' to him of what you seen to-night. He'd only

make a muss with Crawford. No good 'u'd come of that."

"Indade, Oi'll promise nothin' av the koind!" retorted her mother decisively. "D'ye think Oi'm goin' to l'ave ye an' that man to yir carryin's on? Not if Oi know it. Yir father will deal with him an' with ye, too."

"You keep quiet an' I'll promise never to see Crawford again—on me honor," she appealed.

"Yir honor!" laughed her mother harshly. "Yir honor!"

"Don't you see I'm doin' this for pop's sake?" urged Patsy. "There ain't no need for him to know—to know——"

"The koind av a girl ye are," broke in her mother angrily. "D'ye think Oi'd decaive him as ye've been decaivin' us?"

"No, there ain't no need for him to know the sort of girl I am," repeated Patsy, writhing under the cruel, unmerited interjection. "You'll promise, mom? It's the last thing I'll ever ask you. Say you will for his sake—for the sake of me that was dear to you once."

She appealed to Mallory in turn:

"Won't you promise?"

Mallory turned to Mrs. O'Brien.

"It won't do no good to tell him," he said. "It's no use breakin' his heart like she's broke mine—an' yours."

"Thin ye promise never to see Crawford ag'in?" demanded her mother.

"I promise, mom. An' you can believe me," she said earnestly.

"All right, then. I won't tell, if Danny thinks it best," the old woman agreed.

"What lie are you goin' to frame up for your father?" asked Mallory.

"I'll tell him it's all off between you an' me—an' that's no lie," Patsy answered.

Mrs. O'Brien looked dubious.

"Ye'll have to think of somethin' better'n a quarrel to convince yir father," she said. "He'll want some good reason for me takin' Nora home with me."

"You're goin' to take Nora away from me?" questioned Patsy, with wide, frightened eyes.

"Phwat d'ye think!" flared up her mother. "D'ye s'pose I'd leave me baby with ye? It's hoigh toime she was out av this."

"Then I ain't goin' to have no one! You don't think I'm fit to have my honey lamb around! You think I'd make my sister bad! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

Patsy burst into a passion of tears, and fled from the room.

Mrs. O'Brien gazed after her, visibly perplexed. Dan was rubbing his chin vigorously and shifting uneasily from one foot to another.

"Oi almost misdoubt me own sinses," said the mother. "It's hard to believe her bad. Oh, what's to become av her?"

"You'd better take her home with you for the present," Dan advised. "You can't leave her here alone to be tempted by that—that man. No one knows but you an' me."

"But what if O'Brien's gone to Crawford's?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he had," he admitted. "I don't think, though, Crawford'll tell him much. You heard him say he didn't want no row on his hands."

Anyhow, you'll take her, won't you? Who'll stand by her if you don't? She can't be anythin' more to me, but I'd be sorry if she went from bad to worse."

Mrs. O'Brien reflected.

"Ye're right, Danny, that's sure," she said. "It's me duty to take her home an' save her from becomin' worse. But Oi misdoubt if she'll listen to me. Help me to persuade her. Oi've no one to lean on but you, bhoy. Ye'll have a talk with her?"

He answered in the affirmative.

"An' yez won't let me face O'Brien alone, will ye? Help me to lie to him!"

"Don't worry, I'll fix it," he assured her.

"God love ye, Danny, bhoy," she said. "I'll l'ave ye so that ye can talk to her alone."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mallory waited for Patsy to return to the room. He had no doubt that she would do so when her paroxysm of weeping had spent itself. Now that the fury inspired by the discovery of her supposed faithlessness and duplicity had calmed down, the open wound of their separation was smarting, and the sight of her misery and despair had not tended to alleviate the pain. But at the mere recollection of Crawford and the lie of the life he imagined Patsy had been living his heart hardened against any softening influence of compassion.

In the old days, before he had met her, when he was accustomed to vaunt his anti-matrimonial views and his skepticism in regard to women, he had been fond of quoting a dictum of Cicero's that he had read somewhere at some time, and which had impressed itself upon his memory as pointing his pet argument, although actual experience had not justified his use of it, for he had never had occasion to put it to the proof:

"Confide your vessel to the wind and water, but

confide not your heart to a woman: the ocean is less perfidious than the promise of a woman."

It came back to him now as cruelly appropriate to his case. Henceforward, he told himself, he would believe in nothing and no one. With what would remain to him from the ruins of his training-stable business he would betake himself West, and, keeping to himself, strive only for one thing—money; since money was the pass that opened all doors and procured the gratification of all desires. Honor, love, counted as nought in this world. Money counted for everything.

His bitter musing was interrupted by the advent of Nora in high dudgeon:

"What's this about going home?" she demanded. "Patsy says mom's going to take me away."

"So she is. She thinks it best. So do I," he said.

"What for? I don't want to go home. I can't live down on that stupid old farm now, and I won't. I've had enough to bear without being dragged into the country where there's no fun nor anything. Why, they've promised me a part in the next show. Besides, I ain't going to run away and have those girls

gossiping about me. I'll get even with Sylvia Simpson for getting me into this mess, the jealous cat!"

"Jealous? Of what?"

"Of everything—because I'm younger and prettier than she is—because I'm going to have the part she wanted. The idea, talking about me to people!"

"She said you were at Crawford's rooms to-night."

"I know—sent pop and mom chasing after me."

Mallory was astonished.

"How did you know that?" he demanded.

"Mom told me," she answered, quick as a flash, but reddening.

"She did? I'd hardly have thought she'd 'a' done that."

"Yes, and that ain't the worst of it," she went on, eager to seize the opportunity of being alone with him to broach what she had on her mind, and do what her sister had refused to do. "Oh, Dan, we're in awful trouble."

"That so? What is it?"

"We—er—we—er——"

She stopped, not liking, and hardly knowing how, to go on.

"Come on, out with it," he said rather gruffly.
"What d'you want me to do?"

"I'll tell you, Dan, because I know you'll stand by us, for mom's sake."

"Let's see what it is first."

"Well, we owe money, and—and—Patsy says we can save it out of what we earn. But how are we ever going to save three hundred dollars?"

"Is that all your trouble?" he asked. He had wondered what further misfortune he was about to hear of. He took it for granted that the money had to do with the furnishing of the flat. "Have the bill sent to me. I'll pay it," he added.

"But that won't do," she objected. "I'll have to pay the note myself."

"Oh, it's a note?"

"Yes, we had to raise money somehow, and now the note's got to be paid at once. Patsy promised she'd get the three hundred dollars from you, but she won't ask you, now you've quarreled."

"How d'you know we've quarreled?"

"She told me so."

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"Why do you have to pay the note—why can't I pay it? I haven't the money about me, but I can send it."

"No, you'll have to give it to me. You see, I borrowed it myself—off—off one of the girls at the theatre, and it would be better for me to give it her back. I wouldn't like her to know——"

"Oh, all right," he acquiesced. "I'll give the money to you. I'll get it to-morrow. Tell your sister I'd like to see her, will you?"

"No, don't. You'll spoil everything if you tell Patsy," said the girl, apprehensively.

"I guess not," he assured her. "I want to see her about somethin' else."

"That's a darned funny business," commented Dan, when she had gone. "I wonder how much the old lady's told her? An' how did they come to borrow all that money from one of the girls at the theatre, on a short-term note, when they gave us to believe they'd bought the things on the instalment-plan an' paid for 'em? They couldn't 'a' wanted it for anythin' else, as I can see. They've been fillin' us up with more guff an' lies, I suppose."

Patsy entered the room.

"Well?" she interrogated coldly.

"Will you let me speak to you a minute, please?"

he asked, awkward and ill at ease.

"What can we have to say to each other now?"

"Nothin' about to-night—let that go as it lays. I'd like to ask a favor of you."

"By what right?"

"Oh, no right. I ain't got no rights any more. Forget me in this, it's for your mother."

"I guess she don't want nothin' from me—not love, even."

"I wouldn't say that. She's been hard on you to-night; it's natural, under the circumstances; but——"

"She thinks I gave her cause," broke in Patsy sadly.

He looked at her askance.

"What do *you* think?" he demanded.

"I ain't thinkin'. I don't care."

"But I know there's nothin' you wouldn't do for her."

"That's right—though she doesn't seem wise to the fact."

"She wants you to come home with her."

"Home! What for? Oh, I see, she can't trust me—she don't believe I'd keep me promise. An' all I've ever done, an' all I've ever been to her don't count for nothin'."

"No, it ain't that," said Mallory, embarrassed under the steady gaze she fixed upon him.

"Then why doesn't she come to me an' say it herself? Why does she send you?"

"She thought you mightn't listen to her. She hoped I could persuade you, but that time's past, an' I see it's useless to plead with you."

"I *can't* go. What d'you think I am? Go down home an' have you an' mom overlookin' things—bein' sorry for me—kind to me! Not for mine, thank you."

"No, I promise you. All will be forgotten."

"An' forgiven. Wait till I ask it, will you?"

"Then give me a reason why you won't do what she asks that I can give her. I got to tell her some-
thin'. Is it—is it because you love Crawford?"

"Love him! Love *him!*"

The expression of loathing on her face, and the tone of profound scorn in which the ejaculation was uttered, made Mallory's heart leap within him.

"Then why——" he began.

She interrupted him angrily.

"Look here—what right have you to stand there givin' me the third degree?" she demanded. "I *can't* go, an' I *won't* go, an' that settles it."

She turned from him, but he followed her.

"Is it the money?" he asked.

"The money?"

She turned and faced him with questioning eyes.

"Nora's told me. I'm goin' to pay the note."

"You're goin' to pay Crawford?"

"Crawford!"

He stood gazing at her open-mouthed. Suddenly a look of understanding and of great joy came over his face.

"So it was Crawford! Now I see!" he exclaimed.

He ran to the door.

"Mrs. O'Brien, will you come here a minute?" he called.

"One question," he said, when she appeared. "Have you told Nora what happened to-night—did you tell her that you'd been to Crawford's?"

"No, Oi did not," replied the old woman. "What'd Oi tell the poor choild annythin' about it now for, an' she sick as it is? It ain't necessary she should be made worse by knowin' her sister's disgrace. Oi'll find out to-morrow what Oi want to know from her."

It was all clear to Mallory now. Tears of mingled tenderness, thankfulness, and exultation welled to his eyes. He paced rapidly to and fro in an effort to master his emotion, while the old woman and Patsy looked at him, wondering what was the cause of it.

"I'm goin' to show you up," he cried, stopping in front of Patsy. "I'm goin' to tell your mother the kind of a girl you are—tell her I know all about you an' Crawford—tell her that you didn't stop at any lengths to save your sister—that it was Nora who owed money to Crawford and that Nora was in that room you prevented him goin' into—tell her that I'm the biggest fool on earth, the lowest dog alive, to doubt for one minute the girl I love, the girl who's too good for me—too good for any of us!"

"Phwat's that! Danny, phwat d'ye mean? For Hiv'n's sake, what d'ye mean?" inquired the old woman imploringly, torn by joy and fear.

Patsy had uttered a little cry of dismay.

"It's all a mistake," she cried. "Nora's as good as an angel."

"Nora, come here!" shouted Mallory.

"No, don't," entreated Patsy earnestly. "Don't ask her anything."

"What were you doing in that room at Crawford's to-night?" he demanded sternly when the girl tripped in.

Nora reddened and looked from one to the other with the startled gaze of a trapped fawn.

"You've told on me—you mean thing!" she almost screamed at Patsy. Then she sought refuge in a burst of hysterical weeping.

While Patsy tried to explain and palliate and condone, Mallory and Mrs. O'Brien by dint of questioning and by working upon her fears drew the whole story from Nora. Then Mrs. O'Brien took Patsy in her arms and cried over her, and was hugged and cried over in turn.

Very humbly and very penitently Mallory advanced to receive his share of forgiveness, also.

Patsy repulsed him.

"Nit, Daniel Mallory," she said. "You doubted me and would not hear me the first time the chance to stand by me showed itself, an' I'll never believe in you again."

"I deserve all that's comin' to me, but handle me gently, I was mad jealous," he pleaded, "mad jealous clean through, and unable to reason."

A ringing at the bell checked further attempt at reconciliation.

"There's your father," said Mallory, turning to Nora. "Chase yourself, get a move on! Don't let him see you snivellin'."

Mrs. O'Brien opened the front door and her husband came in. He was very pale and his compressed lips and the ominous look in his eyes denoted that he was in a white heat of anger.

"Wheriver have ye been?" queried Mrs. O'Brien.

"Oi've been to Crawford's," he announced.

"Why, the girl's here!" she said.

"She wasn't here when we came at tin o'clock, was she?" he questioned sarcastically.

"Yes," affirmed Mallory. "She came home with a sick headache before the show an' didn't hear your ringin' because she was fast asleep in her room."

"An' where was she?" he demanded, indicating Patsy.

For a moment no one spoke. All were filled with secret consternation. Had Crawford, after all, told him what had happened?

"Patsy was around to the drug-store," lied her mother desperately. "That talk av Nora an' Crawford was gossip, the clatter of an oidle tongue."

"It was, was it? Thin phwat's this note he gave me with a demand for the money? He said he lint three hundred dollars to get 'em out av a hole, and told me to give it to 'em as a souvenir, if they hadn't the dacency to make good. If it's all gossip, how comes he to have a note for money I never had, soigned with me name?"

He thrust the paper under Patsy's nose. She took it and stared at it blankly, finding nothing to say.

"Well, girl, haven't ye a tongue in yir head?" her

father almost shouted, and almost dancing with rage. "Who soigned 'P. O'Brien' to that paper? Who dared to use my name?"

It was clear that though the yellow-dog streak in Crawford had impelled him to try and make trouble with the note he had been careful to avoid a violent scene with O'Brien by recounting the events of the evening. Mallory plucked up courage.

"What's the matter with you, pop?" he said. "It's her own name. It's signed 'P. O'Brien.' Why shouldn't she sign it? Why shouldn't she get money from Crawford? It's owin' to me, an' what's mine's hers. Crawford an' me's had a run in. I've quit him, an' he's sore, that's all."

Patsy shot a glance of gratitude toward him.

O'Brien was nonplused.

"What would she be doin' with that amount av money?" he inquired.

"That would be tellin'," laughed Mallory. "That's our own little secret."

Mrs. O'Brien came to his aid.

"Moind yir own business, Patrick," she ordered, with her old-time domineering manner. "It's the ex-

coitable man ye are careerin' all over town an' us waitin' supper for ye. Run out an' rush the growler, if it ain't too late."

"Excuse me, Patsy. 'Twas all a mistake, I see," he said, preparing to do as he was bidden.

"Forget it, pop," she replied, imprinting a kiss on his lips.

O'Brien, all cheerfulness, went out.

"God love ye for the good girl ye are," said her mother fondly, "an' may He forgive me, for I need it."

"S-sh!" chided Patsy, as she put her arms around the old woman's neck.

"Do I come in on this now?" demanded Mallory wistfully.

For answer Patsy put out an arm and included him in her embrace.

"This evenin' settles it," he said, when he also had received the long, sweet impress of the seal of pardon and her mother had abandoned her to his caresses. "We'll take no more chances, dear. We have waited on the future too long. You'll come home with me now."



"YOU'LL COME HOME WITH ME NOW."

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"Yes, Dan," sighed Patsy happily, resting her head on his shoulder. "An' we'll settle down like a couple of Reubens—us an' the cows."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The days that followed the return of Mallory and the O'Brien family to Maple Grove were days of worry and anxiety for all. The outlook was not precisely calculated to induce jubilation. As the result of the sudden break with Mallory's partner hard times were at the very door and hovered depressingly over the household. Crawford had lost no time in calling for a settlement of his loan and a dissolution of partnership. Mallory did not have and could not raise the wherewithal to meet the demand, and the foreclosure of the mortgage was the impending consequence.

The trainer was well aware that the summary sale at auction of the horses and training-quarters which Crawford would insist upon regardless of loss to himself was not likely to net more than one-third of their value, and that he would be left penniless, to all intents and purposes. His association with Crawford, therefore, instead of bringing the substantial advantage he had anticipated, and which its continuance would have insured, for the business was beginning to prosper, had

left him in a worse position than he was in before. He could not even conclude the sale of Lady Belle, for Crawford's first move had been to obtain an injunction restraining him from disposing of any of the stable property.

All the work of his life had gone for nought. All his years of waiting for Patsy in the hope of being able to win for her a position of comfort and dignity had been spent in vain. He had simply cheated himself and her of the happiness that might have been theirs during that time. He ground his teeth with impotent rage at the thought of it. Nothing remained for him but to wrest what bliss he could from the years that remained by marrying Patsy at once, and to begin all over again the struggle for a living by hunting for a job. To renew, handicapped as he was, the pursuit of fortune which had eluded him like a will-o'-the-wisp was not to be thought of—at least not then. Never for a minute, however, did he regret his treatment of Crawford. With the certainty of even worse befalling him he would have done the same thing in the same circumstances.

Patsy was for waiting a while longer and returning

to the stage in the meantime, but this proposition he refused absolutely to consider.

"You've sacrificed yourself enough for me an' your family, girl," he said, "an' I'll stand for it no longer. Your father'll get a place somewhere. He knows his business an' ain't afraid to work, an' we'll help 'em, if we can."

Mallory had hopes that through McGovern or some of the big men with whom he had come in contact since starting in business for himself he would be able to procure an executive position in one of the more important racing-establishments, and he purposed in this event to take care of O'Brien.

The O'Briens themselves viewed the prospect anything but hopefully. It was a very serious matter indeed for the old couple to be deprived of the money which Patsy for so long, and recently both Nora and Patsy, had supplied. They had been able to save a little, it was true, and the careful Patsy also had managed to put some by, but their combined resources would not last long. The house in which they lived with Mallory was a very comfortable one. They had become much attached to the place and to the

beauties of its surroundings. The thought that it was to be sold over their heads increased the heaviness of their hearts, already filled with grief at the misfortune which had overtaken Mallory, the real cause of which had been kept from O'Brien, who had been given to understand that the dispute with Crawford had arisen over business matters.

Their worry was added to not a little by Nora. She had strenuously rebelled against returning with them, and to overcome her resistance her mother had had to threaten to disclose to her father the girl's dealings with Crawford. Brought home against her will, she was sullen, irritable, and quarrelsome, and thought only of how she could throw off the restraint placed upon her and get back to New York and the theatre.

Aside from Mallory, who was sustained in his trouble by the consciousness of the nearness of his marriage and by the encouragement of his bride-to-be, the only person who preserved any semblance of cheerfulness was Patsy. She was to become Mrs. Mallory immediately the work of winding up the stable business had been concluded, and the mere fact that she was with him and her other loved ones every day

made her happy. She could not be downcast, and refused to believe that everything would not come out right in the end. To her, love made all things easy, and its glamour was upon everything.

She and Mallory had decided that when the time to leave Maple Grove arrived they would be married without fuss of any kind and take up their abode temporarily in the flat owned jointly by Patsy and Nora in New York, where he would be in personal touch with the men who could employ him. Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien were to remove their belongings to a little house in the village of Maple Grove, where they were to reside with Nora until further notice.

It was about a week after their return home, and while all were under the influence of that feverish restlessness which accompanies the sudden sense of non-proprietorship of a place that one has regarded as one's own, and of the imminence of departure, that the household was surprised one afternoon by a visit from the Duke.

Mrs. O'Brien was alone in the kitchen when, transformed as Patsy had seen him, he drove up in the village hack and alighted.

"Hiv'n help us, who's this?" she muttered, taking stock of him for a moment through the window and then hastily dusting the chairs with her apron. "Must be some wan come to buy the stable."

The Duke knocked and walked in without waiting for her to open the door.

"Don'tcher now me, Mrs. O'Brien?" he questioned, his face beaming.

There was no mistaking his voice and his accent.

"Bless the choild, 'tis the Dook. Well, Oi declare!" she exclaimed, beaming in turn. "Oi thought sure yez was the Prisident or the Prince av Wales, yez looks so smart."

"Me togs ain't so dusty, are they?" he said. "Bought 'em in Lunden. 'Ad 'em myde to measure in a swagger shop in 'Igh 'Olborn. Twig the gyvry tie-pin!"

"Ye're rale beautiful," she declared, "an' clane enough to eat. Oi niver seen yez look so clane."

"I've wollerred in a mariner's gryve, otherwise a barth, every d'y since I went away," he told her proudly.

"A bath every day! Ye're too hoigh-toned for Maple Grove. But don't stand twistin' yir hat in yir

hand; sit down an' tell us where ye've been an' phwat's happened to yez."

She sat down herself, and prepared to listen to his story, but just at that minute Patsy and Nora, who had seen the hack approaching and wanted to know who the caller was and what he wanted, came downstairs.

Patsy was glad to see the Duke again. Her gratitude for his kindness to her in her trouble and for his discretion in refraining from asking questions had not diminished. She advanced with a smile and a cheery greeting, and shook hands with him cordially. Timidly, and blushing deeply, he extended his hand to Nora. The girl, who had been eying him with wonder, gave him her own limply.

"Ain't it fine for you all to be 'ere," he said. "It feels like comin' 'ome. You was all so awful kind to me that I just 'ad to come down an' see you as soon as I could."

"'Tis wilcome ye are, an' Oi'm glad to see yez," the old woman assured him. "Yez have come a long way, an' must stay to have a bite with us."

"Thank you, mum. I'd like to st'y altogether, if me old plyce's goin'," he said.

"It isn't, me poor bhoy, an' yez have had yir journey for nothin'," she replied sadly. "Mister Mal-lory'd give it to yez if he could, Oi'm sure, but he can't. The stable's goin' to be sold, an' we'll be lookin' for jobs oursilves, so ye'd better take the first train back. Oi wisht ye'd 'a' written, 'twould have saved yez the expinse."

"The styble's for syle? Wot for?" asked the surprised Duke. "Don't it p'y?"

"It ain't that, an' Oi can't give yez the partic'lars, seein' they don't concern yez. The partnership's broken, that's all."

"Bli' me tight! 'Qo'd 'a' thought it!" he ejaculated. "How abaout the Shrimp; 'as 'e gone?"

"Yes, he's already gone."

"Too bad. I'd like to 'a' seen him."

Pressed by Mrs. O'Brien, the Duke explained the reason of his summons by telegraph, and recounted the story of his trip to England. She already knew as much of his family history as he had told to Nora.

"Me uncle, mother's brother, 'oo we caime to America to look for, wusn't 'ere at all," he said. "He'd gone to Austrylia, where 'e myde a fortune. 'E pegged aout larst year, an' not 'aving any other relations alive, left fifty thaousand paounds to mother an' me. 'Is lawyer faound aout where mother was—an' there you are. Mother's still on the other side, but I caime back. I got 'omesick. No one ain't been kind to me like you 'ave. An' I wanted to arsk Mr. Mallory's advice, 'cause I know 'e'd advise me stryght. I'd like to invest some of me 'under'd an' twenty-five thaousand dollars, an' I don't now nothin' 'ceptin' 'orses. D'you think 'e'd tyke me into business with 'im, instead of breakin' up the styble? I'd like the chanst, if it don't cost too much, an' mother'd be satisfied, I'm sure. She's worryin' abaout what I'll do with me money."

He added, feeling apologetic at daring to place himself on anything like a level with his former employer, whom he held in great respect:

"You see, if I'm in the business with Mr. Mallory 'e might put me in the w'y of becomin' a jockey. I'm goin' to be a gryte jockey one of these d'ys."

He ventured to look at Nora, whom this announcement was intended to impress. She had listened to his story at first with disdainful indifference, but as it proceeded her interest grew until it became very deep. She began to see all kinds of qualities in the Duke which, strangely enough, had not been visible to her before. For the first time it struck her that he was good-looking, and when at last he overcame his bashfulness sufficiently to glance in her direction she was smiling at him amiably, and her gaze meeting his set the blood pulsing wildly through his veins and his heart to beating violently.

When Mallory and O'Brien came in from the stables a little later the former had already been made acquainted by Patsy with the Duke's story and desires. That evening there was a lengthy conference between the trainer and the ex-stable-boy, who remained for the night as the guest of the family. The next day both started for New York, and the Duke knew as much about the financial conditions and possibilities of the stable as Mallory did himself.

About the most amazed man in New York was Richard Crawford, when his loan and Nora's debt

were repaid and his partnership interest in the training-stable as determined by the dissolution proceedings duly settled. He was further balked of his revenge by the fact that neither Patsy nor Nora sought another engagement on the stage. Nora had become suddenly reconciled to staying at home, and to the delight of her parents had recovered her vivacity—likewise her ingenuousness. The one person she was disagreeable with was the Shrimp, who had returned to Maple Grove in the capacity of head stable-boy.

Mallory was helped not a little in the reorganization of his affairs by the fact that Mr. Perkins—no one save Mrs. O'Brien continued to call him the Duke, and he liked to be so designated by her—had insisted against Mallory's advice on buying Lady Belle for himself at the price offered for her by McGovern. The purchase was made for sentimental reasons that Mallory could know nothing about, but the retention of the mare proved a big thing for the stable subsequently. In fact, Dan's new partner developed an enterprise and ability that lifted the business upon a plane where Mallory admitted in his heart of hearts that he unaided in this manner never could have placed it.

Mr. Perkins was very fond of Lady Belle, but he no longer needed her as a confidante. He was bent on murmuring his soul's secret into other ears when the proper time and opportunity should come, and he had every reason to hope that it would not be unfavorably received.

CHAPTER XXV.

The sun-flooded air of Maple Grove was once more redolent of the awakening fields and woods. Beneath the glowing fruit-buds violets that carpeted the ground between the trees sent up sweet incense that passing zephyrs bore through the open windows. Peace and a great felicity were upon the homestead.

Daniel Mallory and his wife, home from their honeymoon wanderings, gazed round upon the scene from the cottage he had built for them, their hearts swelling with the emotion it inspired and the ecstasy of their consecrated love.

"Patsy," he said, as she laid her head on his shoulder and his arm stole around her waist, "I ain't able to understand it yet. I never done nothin' in my life to deserve all this happiness. I don't believe nobody ever lived in the world that was as happy as me."

"That's how I feel about myself," she answered. "When I think of all that's happened, an' the waitin'

an' the longin'—when I think that we're hitched up at last forever an' ever, an' no one can separate us—I grow afraid for fear I won't live."

He pressed her to him convulsively and kissed her brow.

"Don't say such things, little woman," he said.
"Tell me only that you love me."

She looked up at him with her soul shining in her eyes.

"Dan, my husband, I love you," she murmured.

THE END.

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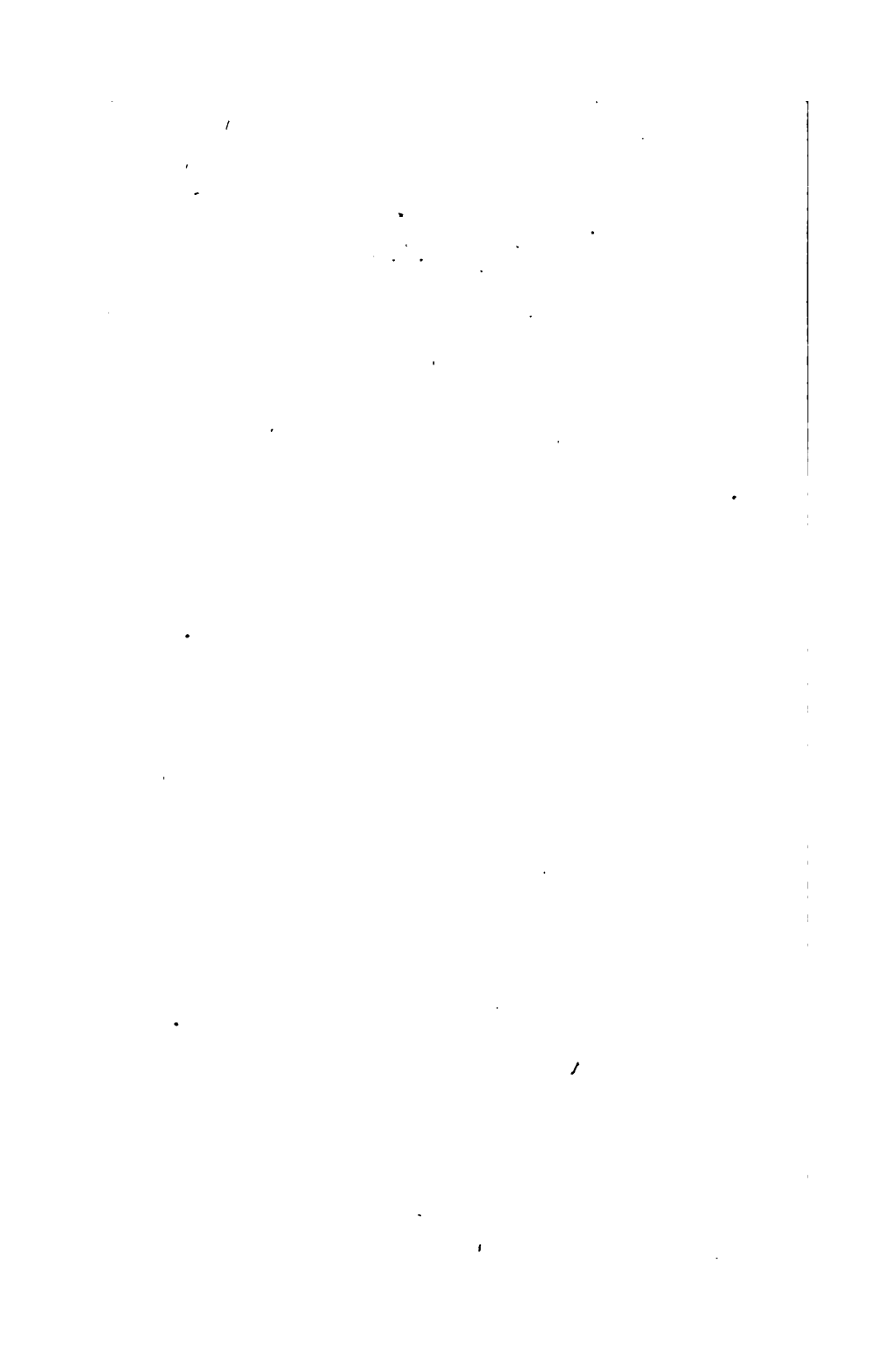
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